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A HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

VOLUME ONE

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS 1914

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS 1914

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT BOER WAR,"
ETC.

NEW YORK
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TO

GENERAL SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON

THIS CHRONICLE OF THE GREAT WAR

IN WHICH HE RENDERED

SUCH INVALUABLE SERVICE TO HIS COUNTRY

IS

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PREFACE

It is continually stated that it is impossible to bring out at the present time any accurate history of the war. No doubt this is true so far as some points of the larger strategy are concerned, for the motives at the back of them have not yet been cleared up. It is true also as regards many incidents which have exercised the minds of statesmen and of many possibilities which have worried the soldiers. But so far as the actual early events of our own campaign upon the continent are concerned there is no reason why the approximate truth should not now be collected and set forth. I believe that the narrative in this volume will in the main stand the test of time, and that the changes of the future will consist of additions rather than of alterations or subtractions.

The present volume deals only with the events of 1914 in the British fighting-line in France and Belgium. A second volume dealing with 1915 will be published within a few months. It is intended that a third volume, covering the current year, shall carry on this contemporary narrative of a tremendous episode.

From the first days of the war I have devoted

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much of my time to the accumulation of evidence from first-hand sources as to the various happenings of these great days. I have built up my narrative from letters, diaries, and interviews from the hand or lips of men who have been soldiers in our armies, the deeds of which it was my ambition to understand and to chronicle. In many cases I have been privileged to submit my descriptions of the principal incidents to prominent actors in them, and to receive their corrections or endorsements. I can say with certainty, therefore, that a great deal of this work is not only accurate, but that it is very precisely correct in its detail. The necessary restrictions which forbade the mention of numbered units have now been removed, a change made possible by the very general rearrangements which have recently taken place. I am able, therefore, to deal freely with my material. As that material is not always equally full, it may have occasionally led to a want of proportion, where the brigade occupies a line and the battalion a paragraph. In extenuation of such faults, and of the omissions which are unavoidable, I can only plead the difficulty of the task and throw myself upon the reader's good nature. Some compensation for such shortcoming may be found in the fact that a narrative written at the time reflects the warm emotions which these events aroused amongst us more clearly than the more measured story of the future historian can do.

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It may seem that the political chapters are somewhat long for a military work, but the reader will find that in subsequent volumes there are no further politics, so that this survey of the European conditions of 1914 is a lead up to the whole long narrative of the actual contest.

I would thank my innumerable correspondents (whom I may not name) for their very great help. I would also admit the profit which I have derived from reading Coleman's *Mons to Ypres*, and especially Lord Ernest Hamilton's *The First Seven Divisions*. These books added some new facts, and enabled me to check many old ones.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

WINDLESHAM, CROWBOROUGH,
October, 1916.

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CHAPTER I

THE BREAKING OF THE PEACE

CHAPTER I.

The breaking of the peace.

In the frank, cynical, and powerful book of General Bernhardi which has been so often quoted in connection with the war there is one statement which is both true and important. It is, that no one in Great Britain thought seriously of a war with Germany before the year 1902. As a German observer he has fixed this date, and a British commentator who cast back through the history of the past would surely endorse it. Here, then, is a point of common agreement from which one can construct a scheme of thought.

Why then should the British people in the year 1902 begin to seriously contemplate the possibility of a war with Germany? It might be argued by a German apologist that this date marks an appreciation by Great Britain that Germany was a great trade rival who might with advantage be crushed. But the facts would not sustain such a conclusion. The growth of German trade and of German wealth was a phenomenon with which the British were familiar. It had been constant since the days when Bismarck changed the policy of his country from free trade to protection, and it had competed for twenty years without the idea of war having entered British

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minds. On the contrary, the prevailing economic philosophy in Great Britain was, that trade reacts upon trade, and that the successful rival becomes always the best customer. It is true that manufacturers expressed occasional irritation at the methods of German commerce, such as the imitation of British trade-marks and shoddy reproductions of British products. The Fatherland can produce both the best and the worst, and the latter either undersold us or forced down our own standards. But apart from this natural annoyance, the growing trade of Germany produced no hostility in Great Britain which could conceivably have led to an armed conflict. Up to the year 1896 there was a great deal of sympathy and of respect in Great Britain for the German Empire. It was felt that of all Continental Powers she was the one which was most nearly allied to Britain in blood, religion, and character. The fact that in 1890 Lord Salisbury deliberately handed over to Germany Heligoland—an island which blockaded her chief commercial port and the harbour of her warships—must show once for all how entirely Germany lay outside of any possible world-struggle which could at that time be foreseen. France has always had its warm partisans in this country, but none the less it can most truthfully be said that during all the years that Britain remained in political isolation she would, had she been forced to take sides, have assuredly chosen to stand by the Triple Alliance. It is hard now to recall those days of French pinpricks and of the evil effects which they produced. Germany's foreign policy is her own affair, and the German people are the judges of those who control it, but to us it must appear absolutely

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demented in taking a line which has driven this great world-power away from her side—or, putting it at its lowest, away from an absolute neutrality, and into the ranks of her enemies.

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In 1896 there came the first serious chill in the relations between the two countries. It arose from the famous telegram to Kruger at the time of the Jameson Raid—a telegram which bore the name of the Kaiser but which is understood to have been drafted by Baron Marschall von Bieberstein. Whoever was responsible for it did his country a poor service, for British feelings were deeply hurt at such an intrusion into a matter which bore no direct relation to Germany. Britons had put themselves thoroughly in the wrong. Britain admitted and deplored it. Public opinion was the more sensitive to outside interference, and the telegram of congratulation from the Emperor to Kruger was felt to be an uncalled-for impertinence. The matter passed, however, and would have been forgiven and forgotten but for the virulent agitation conducted against us in Germany during the Boer War—an agitation which, it is only fair to say, appeared to receive no support from the Kaiser himself, who twice visited England during the course of the struggle. It could not be forgotten, however, that Von Bülow, the Chancellor, assumed an offensive attitude in some of his speeches, that the very idea of an Anglo-German Alliance put forward by Chamberlain in 1901 was scouted by the German Press, and that in the whole country there was hardly a paper which did not join in a chorus of unreasoned hatred and calumny against ourselves, our policy, and our arms. The incident was a perfectly astounding revelation to the

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British, who looked back at the alliance between the two countries, and had imagined that the traditions of such battles as Minden or Dettingen, where British blood had been freely shed in Prussia's quarrel, really stood for something in their present relations. Britons were absolutely unconscious of anything which had occurred to alter the bonds which history had formed. It was clear, once for all, that this was mere self-deception, and as the British are a practical race, who are more concerned with what is than why it is, they resigned themselves to the situation and adjusted their thoughts to this new phase of their relations.

But soon a new phenomenon engaged their attention. They had already realised that the Germans, for some motive which appeared to them to be entirely inadequate, were filled with hatred, and would do the British Empire an injury if they had the power. Hitherto, they had never had the power. But now it was evident that they were forging a weapon which might enable them to gratify their malevolence. In 1900 was passed the famous German law regulating the increase of their navy. The British, preoccupied by their South African War, took no great notice of it at the time, but from 1902 onwards it engaged their attention to an ever-increasing degree. The original law was ambitious and far-reaching, but it was subjected to several modifications, each of which made it more formidable. By a system as inexorable as Fate, year after year added to the force which was being prepared at Wilhelmshaven and at Kiel—a force entirely out of proportion to the amount of German commerce to be defended or of German coast-line to be protected. The greatest army in the

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world was rapidly being supplemented by a fleet which would be dangerously near, both in numbers and quality, to our own. The British Admiralty, more influenced by party politics than the German, showed at times commendable activity, and at other periods inexcusable indifference. On the whole, it was well ahead in its building programmes, for a wide circle of the public had become thoroughly awakened to the danger, and kept up a continual and most justifiable agitation for a broader margin of safety. Fortunately, the two final rulers of the Navy—McKenna and Churchill—rose to their responsibilities, and, in spite of a clamour from a section of their own party, insisted upon an adequate preponderance of naval construction. A deep debt of gratitude is owed also to the action of Lord Fisher, who saw the danger afar off and used all his remarkable powers of organisation and initiative to ensure that his country should be ready for the approaching struggle.

Great Britain, being much exercised in mind by the menacing tone of Germany, expressed not only in her great and rapid naval preparations, but in an astonishing outburst of minatory speeches and literature from professors, journalists, and other leaders of the people, began from 1902 onwards to look round her for allies. Had she continued to remain isolated, some turn of the political wheel might have exposed her to a Continental coalition under the leadership and inspiration of this bitter enemy. But for the threats of Germany, Britain would in all probability have been able to keep aloof from entanglements, but as it was, the enemies of her enemy became of necessity her friends. In an attempt to preserve her

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independence of action so far as was still possible, she refused to form an alliance, and only committed herself in a vague fashion to an ill-defined *entente*. By settling several outstanding causes of friction with France, an agreement was come to in the year 1903 which was extended to Russia in 1907. The general purport of such an arrangement was, that the sympathies of Great Britain were with the Dual Alliance, and that these sympathies would be translated into action if events seemed to warrant it. An aggressive policy on the part of France or Russia would be absolutely discountenanced by Britain, but if France were attacked Britain would pledge herself to do her utmost to prevent her from being overwhelmed. It was recognised that a victorious Germany would constitute a serious menace to the British Empire—a fact which neither the Pan-German fanatics nor the German national Press would ever permit us to forget. In this policy of insuring against a German attack King Edward VII. took a deep interest, and the policy is itself attributed to him in Germany, but as a matter of fact it represented the only sane course of action which was open to the nation. Germans are fond of representing King Edward's action as the cause of subsequent events, whereas a wider knowledge would show them that it was really the effect of five years of German irritation and menace.

This, then, was the political situation up to the time of the actual outbreak of war. Upon the one side were the German and Austrian Empires in a solid alliance, while Italy was nominally allied, but obviously moved upon an orbit of her own. On the other hand, Russia and France were solidly allied, with

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Britain moving upon an independent orbit which had more relation with that of her friends than Italy's with that of Central Europe. It might clearly have been foreseen that Britain's fate would be that of France, while Italy would break away under any severe test, for a number of open questions divided her vitally from her secular enemy to the north-east. The whole story of the campaign of Tripoli in 1911 showed very clearly how independent, and even antagonistic, were the interests and actions of Italy.

Germany, in the meanwhile, viewed with considerable annoyance the formation of the elastic but very real ties which united France and Britain, while she did not cease to continue the course of action which had encouraged them. It had been one of the axioms of Wilhelmstrasse that whilst the British occupied Egypt, no friendship was possible between them and the French. Even now they were incredulous that such a thing could be, and they subjected it to a succession of tests. They desired to see whether the friendship was a reality, or whether it was only for fair-weather use and would fly to pieces before the stress of storm. Twice they tried it, once in 1905 when they drove France into a conference at Algeciras, and again in 1911, when in a time of profound peace they stirred up trouble by sending a gunboat to Agadir in south-western Morocco, an event which brought Europe to the very edge of war. In each case the *entente* remained so close and firm that it is difficult to imagine that they were really surprised by our actions in 1914, when the enormous provocation of the breach of the Belgian treaty was

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added to our promise to stand by France in any trouble not of her own making.

Allusion has been made to the campaign of threats and abuse which had been going on for many years in Germany, but the matter is of such importance in its bearing upon the outbreak of war that it requires some fuller discussion. For a long period before matters became acute between the two countries, a number of writers, of whom Nietzsche and Treitschke are the best known, had inoculated the German spirit with a most mischievous philosophy, which grew the more rapidly as it was dropped into the favourable soil of Prussian militarism. Nietzsche's doctrines were a mere general defence of might as against right, and of violent brutality against everything which we associate with Christianity and Civilisation. The whooping savage bulked larger in this perverted philosophy than the saint or the martyr. His views, however, though congenial to a certain class of the German people, had no special international significance. The typical brute whom he exalted was blonde, but a brute of any other tint would presumably suffice. It was different in the case of Treitschke. He was a historian, not a philosopher, with nothing indefinite or abstract about his teaching. He used his high position as Professor in the Berlin University to preach the most ardent Chauvinism, and above all to teach the rising generation of Germans that their special task was to have a reckoning with England and to destroy the British Empire, which for some reason he imagined to be degenerate and corrupt. He has passed away before he could see the ruin which he helped to bring about, for there is no doubt that his

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deeds lived after him, and that he is one of half a dozen men who were prominent in guiding their country along the path which has ended in the abyss. Scores of other lesser writers repeated and exaggerated his message. Prominent among these was General von Bernhardi, a man of high standing and a very great authority upon theoretical warfare. In the volume on *Germany and the Next War*, which has been already mentioned, he declared in the year 1911 that Germany should and would do exactly what it has done in 1914. Her antagonists, her allies, and her general strategy are all set forth with a precision which show that German thinkers had entirely made up their minds as to the course of events, and that the particular pretext upon which war would be waged was a matter of secondary importance. These and similar sentiments naturally increased the uneasiness and resentment in Great Britain, where the taxation had risen constantly in the endeavour to keep pace with German preparations, until it was generally felt that such a state of things could not continue without some crisis being reached. The cloud was so heavy that it must either pass or burst.

The situation had been aggravated by the fact that in order to win popular assent to the various increases of the naval estimates in Germany, constantly recurring anti-British agitations were deliberately raised with alarms of an impending attack. As Britain had never thought of attacking Germany during the long years when she had been almost defenceless at sea, it was difficult to perceive why she should do so now; but none the less the public and the politicians were gulled again and again

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by this device, which, while it achieved its purpose of obtaining the money, produced a corresponding resentment in Great Britain. Sometimes these manœuvres to excite public opinion in favour of an increased navy went to extreme lengths which might well have justified an official remonstrance from England. A flagrant example was the arrest, trial, and condemnation of Captain Stewart for espionage upon the evidence of a suborned and perjured criminal. It is a story which is little to the credit of the Imperial Government, of the High Court at Leipzig, or of the British authorities who failed to protect their fellow-countryman from most outrageous treatment.

So much for the causes which helped to produce an evil atmosphere between the two countries. Looking at the matter from the German point of view, there were some root-causes out of which this monstrous growth had come, and it is only fair that these should be acknowledged and recorded. These causes can all be traced to the fact that Britain stood between Germany and that world-empire of which she dreamed. This depended upon circumstances over which this country had no control, and which she could not modify if she had wished to do so. Britain, through her maritime power and through the energy of her merchants, had become a great world-power when Germany was still a collection of petty States. When Germany became a powerful Empire with a rising population and an immense commerce, she found that the choice places of the world, and those most fitted for the spread of a transplanted European race, were already filled up. It was not a matter which Britain could help, nor

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could she alter it, since Canada, Australasia, and South Africa would not, even if she had desired it, be transferred to German rule. And yet it formed a national grievance, and if we can put ourselves in the place of the Germans we may admit that it was galling that the surplus of their manhood should go to build up the strength of an alien and possibly a hostile State. To this point we could fully see that grievance—or rather that misfortune, since no one was in truth to blame in the matter. It was forgotten by their people that the Colonial Empire of the British and of the French had been built up by much outlay of blood and treasure, extending over three centuries. Germany had existed as a united State for less than half a century, and already during that time had built up a very considerable oversea dominion. It was unreasonable to suppose that she could at once attain the same position as her fully grown rivals.

Thus this German discontent was based upon fixed factors which could no more be changed by Britain than the geographical position which has laid her right across the German exit to the oceans of the world. That this deeply rooted national sentiment, which for ever regarded Britain as the Carthage to which they were destined to play the part of Rome, would sooner or later have brought about war, is beyond all doubt. There are a score of considerations which show that a European war had long been planned, and that finally the very date, determined by the completion of the broadened Kiel Canal, had been approximately fixed. The importations of corn, the secret preparations of giant guns, the preparations of concrete gun-platforms, the

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early distribution of mobilisation papers, the sending out of guns for auxiliary cruisers, the arming of the German colonies, all point to a predetermined rupture. If it could not be effected on one pretext, it certainly would on another. As a matter of fact, an occasion was furnished by means which have not yet been fully cleared up. It was one which admirably suited the German book, since it enabled her to make her ally the apparent protagonist and so secure her fidelity to the bond. At the same time, by making the cause of quarrel one which affected only the Slavonic races, she hoped to discourage and detach the more liberal Western Powers and so divide the ranks of the Allies from the outset. It is possible, though not certain, that she might have effected this in the case of Great Britain, but for her own stupendous blunder in the infraction of Belgian neutrality which left us a united nation in our agreement as to the necessity of war.

The political balance of the Great Powers of Europe is so delicately adjusted that any weakening of one means a general oscillation of all. The losses of Russia in a sterile campaign in East Asia in 1904 disturbed the whole peace of the world. Germany took advantage of it at once to bully France over Morocco; and in 1908, judging correctly that Russia was still unfit for war, Austria, with the connivance and help of Germany, tore up the Treaty of Berlin without reference to its other signatories, and annexed the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia immediately issued a futile protest, as did Great Britain, but the latter had no material interest at stake. It was otherwise with Russia. She was the hereditary guardian of Slav interests which

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were directly attacked by this incorporation of an unwilling Slav population into the Austrian Empire. Unable for the moment to prevent it, she waited in silent wrath for the chance of the future, humiliated and exasperated by the knowledge that she had been bullied at the moment of her temporary weakness. So great had been the indignity that it was evident that were she to tolerate a second one it would mean the complete abandonment of her leadership of the race.

On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austrian Empire, made a state visit to Sarajevo in the newly annexed provinces. Here he was assassinated, together with his wife. The immediate criminals were two youths named Princip and Cabrinovic, but what exact forces were at the back of them, or whether they merely represented local discontent, have never yet been clearly shown. Austria was, however, naturally incensed against Serbia, which was looked upon as the centre of all aggressive Slavonic action. Politics take fantastic shapes in this south-eastern corner of Europe, and murder, abduction, forgery, and perjury are weapons which in the past have been freely used by all parties. The provocation in this instance was so immense and the crime so monstrous that had it been established after trustworthy examination that Serbia had indeed been directly connected with it, there is no doubt that the whole of Europe, including Russia, would have acquiesced in any reasonable punishment which could be inflicted. Certainly the public opinion of Great Britain would have been unanimous in keeping clear of any quarrel which seemed to uphold the criminals.

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Austria seems to have instantly made up her mind to push the matter to an extreme conclusion, as is shown by the fact that mobilisation papers were received by Austrians abroad, bearing the date June 30, so that they were issued within two days of the crime. An inquiry was held in connection with the trial of the assassins, which was reported to have implicated individual Serbians in the murder plot, but no charge was made against the Serbian Government. Had Austria now demanded the immediate trial and punishment of these accomplices, she would once again have had the sympathy of the civilised world. Her actual action was far more drastic, and gave impartial observers the conviction that she was endeavouring not to obtain reparation but to ensure war. It is inconceivable that so important a document as her ultimatum was launched without the approval of Berlin, and we have already seen that Germany was in a mood for war. The German newspapers, even before the Austrian demands were made, had begun to insist that in view of the distracted domestic politics of Great Britain, and of the declaration by M. Humbert in the French Senate that the army was unprepared, the hour for definite settlements had arrived.

The Austrian ultimatum was such a demand as one nation has never yet addressed to another. Indeed, it could hardly be said that Serbia would remain a nation if she submitted to it. Some clauses, though severe, were within the bounds of reason. That papers should not be allowed to incite hatred, and that secret societies which were supposed to be connected with the crime should be forcibly suppressed, were not unfair demands. So, too, that all

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accessories to the plot, some of whom are mentioned by name, should be tried, and that certain measures to prevent a possible recurrence of such plots should be adopted. All these demands might be justified, and each of them was, as a matter of fact, accepted by Serbia. The impossible conditions were that Austrian judges should sit in Serbia upon political cases and that delegates of Austria should have partial administrative control in the neighbouring kingdom. Even these outrageous demands were not rejected absolutely by the Serbian Government, though it proclaimed itself to be unable to accept them in the crude form in which they were presented. A humble and conciliatory reply concluded with an expression of the desire to submit any point still open to impartial arbitration. The Austrian Government—or the forces behind it—appeared, however, to have no desire at all to find a peaceful solution. So precipitate were they in their action, that on the receipt of the Serbian reply, in less than an hour the Austrian Minister had left Belgrade, and a diplomatic rupture, the immediate prelude to war, had taken place between the two countries. So far only two figures were on the stage, but already vast shadows were looming in the wings, and all the world was hushed at the presentiment of coming tragedy.

It has been shown that Russia, the elder brother of the Slav races, had once already been humiliated over Austrian policy and could not be indifferent to this new attempt to coerce a Slavonic people. The King of Serbia in his sore need appealed to the Czar and received a sympathetic reply. A moderate castigation of Serbia might have been condoned by Rus-

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sia, but she could not contemplate unmoved a course of action which would practically destroy a kindred State. The Austrian army was already mobilising, so Russia also began to mobilise in the south. Events crowded rapidly upon each other. On July 28 came the declaration of war from Austria to Serbia. Three days later—days which were employed by Great Britain in making every possible effort to prevent the extension of the mischief—Germany as Austria's ally declared war upon Russia. Two days later Germany declared war upon France. The current ran swiftly as it drew nearer to Niagara.

The scope of this chronicle is more immediately concerned with the doings of Great Britain in this sudden and frightful misfortune which had fallen upon Europe. Her peaceful efforts were thrust aside, for she was dealing with those who had predetermined that there should be no peace. Even Austria, the prime mover in discord, had shown herself inclined to treat at the last moment, but Germany had hastened her onwards by a sudden ultimatum to Russia. From that instant the die was cast. The attitude of France was never in doubt. She was taken at a disadvantage, for her President was abroad when the crisis broke out, but the most chivalrous of nations could be relied upon to fulfil her obligations. She took her stand at once by the side of her ally. The one all-important question upon which the history of the world would depend, as so often before, was the action of Great Britain.

Sir Edward Grey had proposed a conference of ambassadors to deal with the situation, a suggestion which was set aside by Germany. So long as the matter was purely Balkan it was outside the sphere

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of special British interests, but day by day it was becoming more clear that France would be involved, and a large party in Great Britain held that it would be impossible for us to stand by and witness any further dismembering of our neighbour. Thus the shadow which had settled so heavily upon the south-east of Europe was creeping across from east to west until it was already darkening the future of Britain. It was obviously the German game, whatever her ultimate designs might be upon the British Empire, to endeavour to keep it peaceful until she had disposed of her Continental opponents. For this reason a strong bid was made for British neutrality upon July 29, through the ambassador at Berlin, Sir Edward Goschen. In an official conversation the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, declared that Germany was ready to pledge herself to take no territory from France in case of victory. He would make no promise as regards the French colonies, nor was anything said as to the French Fleet, nor as to the gigantic indemnity which was already discussed in some of the German papers. In a word, the proposition was that Great Britain was to abandon her friend at the hour of her need on condition that she should be robbed but not mutilated. Subsequent experience of German promises may lead us to doubt, however, whether they would really have insured France against the worst that the victor could inflict.

Sir Edward Grey answered with as much warmth as the iced language of diplomacy will permit. His dispatch of July 30 begins as follows:

"His Majesty's Government cannot for a moment entertain the Chancellor's proposal that they

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should bind themselves to neutrality on such terms.

"What he asks us in effect is, to engage to stand by while French colonies are taken and France is beaten so long as Germany does not take French territory as distinct from the colonies.

"From the material point of view such a proposal is unacceptable, for France, without further territory in Europe being taken from her, could be so crushed as to lose her position as a great Power, and become subordinate to German policy.

"Altogether apart from that, it would be a disgrace for us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France, a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover."

At a subsequent period the Premier, Mr. Asquith, voiced the sentiment of the whole nation when he declared that the proposal was infamous.

The immediate concern of the British Government was to ascertain the views of the rival Powers upon the question of Belgian neutrality, which had been solemnly guaranteed by France, Prussia, and ourselves. How faithfully this guarantee had been observed by France in the past is shown by the fact that even when an infraction of the frontier at Sedan in 1870 would have saved the French Army from total destruction, it had not been attempted. There were signs in advance, however, that Germany proposed to turn the French defences by marching through Belgium. The arrangement of the new German strategic railways upon the frontier all pointed to such a plan. It was evident that such an action must at once bring Britain into the struggle, since it is difficult to see how she could ever hold up her head again if, after promising

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protection to a smaller nation, she broke her bond at the moment of danger. The French, too, who had left their northern frontier comparatively unfortified in reliance upon the integrity of Belgium, would have rightly felt that they had been betrayed by Britain if they suffered now through their confidence in the British guarantee. The Balkans were nothing to Great Britain, but she had more than her interests, she had her national honour at stake upon the Belgian frontier.

On July 31 the British Government asked France and Germany whether they were still prepared to stand by their pledge. France answered promptly that she was, and added that she had withdrawn her armies ten kilometres from the frontier, so as to prove to the world that her position was defensive only. From Germany there came an ominous silence. Meanwhile, in Brussels the German representative, Herr von Below-Saleske, was assuring the Belgian Government that nothing was further from the intention of Germany than an infraction of the frontier. These assurances were continued almost to the moment of the arrival of German troops in Belgium, and give one more instance of the absolute want of truth and honour which from the days of Frederick the Great has been the outstanding characteristic of German diplomacy. Just as the Seven Years' War was begun by an attack upon an ally in times of peace, so her last two campaigns have been opened, the one by the doctored telegram of Ems, and the other by the perfidy to Belgium, which is none the less shameful because it has been publicly admitted by the Chancellor.

Another incident of these crowded days deserves

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some record, as it has been quoted in Germany as an instance of Great Britain having stood in the way of a localisation of the war. This impression is produced by suppressing a telegram in which it is shown that the whole episode arose from a mistake upon the part of Prince Lichnowsky, the German ambassador. On August 1 Sir Edward Grey, still feeling round for some way in which the evil might be minimised, suggested through the telephone to Prince Lichnowsky that if both Germany and France could see their way to stand out, the conflict would then be limited to Austria and Russia. This practical and possible suggestion was transmitted to Berlin in the absurd form that Britain would hold France out of the war, while Russia would be abandoned to Germany and Austria. The Kaiser lost no time in assenting to so delightful a proposal. It was at once pointed out to Prince Lichnowsky that he had made a mistake, and the Prince telegraphed to Berlin a correction of his previous message. This second telegram was suppressed by the German Government, while, some weeks afterwards, they published the inaccurate dispatch in order to give the world the impression that Britain had actually made a move towards peace which had been withdrawn when it was found that it was eagerly welcomed by Germany. The very idea that Britain could in any way pledge the actions of France is grotesque upon the face of it. Whilst making this false suggestion as to the action of Britain, the German Government carefully concealed the fact that Sir Edward Grey had actually gone the extreme length in the interests of peace, of promising that we should detach ourselves from our Allies

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if a conference were held and their attitude was an obstacle to an agreement.

Whether, if Belgian neutrality had been honoured, Great Britain would or would not have come into the war is an academic question which can never be decided. Certainly she would never have come in as a united nation, for public opinion was deeply divided upon the point, and the Cabinet is understood to have been at variance. Only one thing could have closed the ranks and sent the British Empire with absolute unanimity into the fight. This was the one thing which Germany did. However great her military power may be, it seems certain that her diplomatic affairs were grievously mismanaged, and that, in spite of that cloud of spies who have been the precursors of her Uhlans in each of her campaigns, she was singularly ill-informed as to the sentiments of foreign nations. The columns of a single honest British paper would have told her more of the true strength and spirit of the nation than all the eavesdroppers of her famous secret service.

We now come to the critical instant as regards Britain, leading to a succession of incidents in Berlin so admirably described in Sir Edward Goschen's classical report that it seems a profanation to condense it. Having received no reply to their request for a definite assurance about Belgium, the British Government instructed their ambassador to ask for an immediate answer upon August 4. The startling reply from Von Jagow, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, was that the German troops had actually crossed the frontier. With a cynical frankness the German statesman explained that it was a matter of life or death to the Imperial Army to get their blow

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in quickly by the undefended route. In answer to the shocked remonstrance of the British Ambassador, he could only assert that it was now too late to reconsider the matter. About seven in the evening Sir Edward Goschen conveyed an ultimatum upon the subject to the German Government, declaring war unless by midnight a more satisfactory answer could be given.

From Herr von Jagow the Ambassador passed to the Chancellor, whom he found much agitated. He broke into a harangue in which he used the phrase, now become historic, that he could not understand the British Government making such a fuss about a mere scrap of paper, and declared that a breach of territorial neutrality was a matter of no great consequence. A recollection of the history of his own country would none the less have reminded him that it was precisely on account of an infringement of their frontier by the troops of Napoleon that Prussia had entered upon the ill-fated war of 1806. He continued by saying that he held Great Britain responsible for all the terrible events which might happen. Sir Edward pointed out that it was a matter of necessity that Great Britain should keep her engagements, and added with dignity that fear of the consequences could hardly be accepted as a valid reason for breaking them.

Such in brief was the momentous interview which determined the question of peace or war between these two great Empires. Sir Edward immediately forwarded a telegraphic summary of what had occurred to London, but this telegram was never forwarded by the Berlin authorities—one more of those actions for which the word "caddish" is the most

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appropriate British adjective. Throughout all our German experiences both before the war and during it, we have always found our rivals to be formidable; they have usually proved themselves to be both brave and energetic; but hardly ever have we recognised them as gentlemen. Three centuries ago the leading nations of Europe had attained something subtle and gracious which is still denied to the Germans.

The populace of Berlin hastened to show these same unamiable characteristics. Whereas the retiring ambassadors in London, Paris, and also in Vienna, met with courteous treatment, the German mob surrounded the British Embassy and hurled vituperations, and finally stones, at its occupants. Defenceless people were hustled, assaulted, and arrested in the streets. A day or two previously the Russian Embassy had been brutally insulted by the populace upon its departure—a fact which produced some regrettable, but very natural, reprisals in Petrograd, to use the new name for the Russian capital. The French Ambassador and his suite had also been very badly treated in their journey to the Dutch frontier. Thus it was shocking, but not surprising, to find that the Berlin mob indulged in excesses towards the British representatives, and that shameful scenes marked the final hours of Sir Edward Goschen's official duties. Truly, as Herr von Jagow admitted, such incidents leave an indelible stain upon the reputation of Berlin. It is pleasant to be able to add that Von Jagow himself behaved with propriety, and did what he could to mitigate the violence of the populace.

It is difficult for us to imagine how any German

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could possibly for an instant have imagined that Great Britain would stand by in silent acquiescence while the little country which she had sworn to protect was overrun by German troops; but that such a delusion existed is shown not only by the consternation of the Chancellor at Sir Edward's message, but also by the extreme irritation of the Emperor. What part Emperor William had played in the events which led up to the war may possibly remain for ever the subject of debate. There are those who argue that the Crown Prince and the military party had taken advantage of his absence on one of his Norwegian tours, and had hurried matters into such an *impasse* that he was unable to get them back to more peaceful lines. One would wish to think that this were true, and there is evidence that on previous occasions his influence has been exerted upon the side of peace to an extent which was unwelcome to many of his own subjects. On the other hand, it is very difficult to believe that such a situation, led up to by many preparatory steps which included the *fons et origo mali*, the provocative and impossible Austrian ultimatum, could have been arranged without the assent of a man who has notoriously continually interfered directly in every large, and many small, transactions of state. However this may be, it is beyond dispute that the action of Great Britain deprived him for the instant of his usual dignity and courtesy, and he dispatched a verbal message by one of his aides-de-camp in the following terms:

"The Emperor has charged me to express to your Excellency his regret for the occurrences of last night, but to tell you at the same time that you will

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gather from those occurrences an idea of the feelings of his people respecting the action of Great Britain in joining with other nations against her old allies of Waterloo. His Majesty also begs that you will tell the King that he has been proud of the titles of British Field-Marshal and British Admiral, but that in consequence of what has occurred he must now at once divest himself of those titles."

The Ambassador adds feelingly that this message lost nothing of its acerbity by the manner of its delivery. Some artist of the future will do justice to the scene where the benign and dignified old diplomatist sat listening to the rasping utterances of the insolent young Prussian soldier. The actual departure of the Embassy was effected without molestation, thanks once more to the good offices of Herr von Jagow. On the same day, in the presence of a large but silent crowd, the German Ambassador left London and embarked for home in a vessel placed at his disposal by the British Government. His voyage back, *via* Flushing, was safely accomplished, but it is worth recording that it was only the warning from a British warship which prevented him and his staff from being blown up by the mines which had already, within a few hours of the outbreak of hostilities, been strewn thickly by his countrymen in the path of neutral shipping across the highway of commerce in the North Sea. Should our kinsmen of America ever find themselves in our place, let them remember that it is "all in" from the beginning with the Germans.

Let America also remember our experience that no pupil can go to a German school, no scholar to a German university, and no invalid to a German

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health-resort, without the chance of some sudden turn of politics leaving them as prisoners in the country. Even the elderly heart patients at Nauheim were detained by the German authorities. An old admiral among them, Admiral Neeld, made a direct appeal as sailor to sailor to Prince Henry of Prussia, and was answered by the proverb that "War is war." Our contention is that such actions are *not* war, and that their perpetration will never be forgotten or forgiven by the nations of the world, who can have no security that when their subjects pass the German frontier they will ever get clear again. Such practices are, of course, entirely distinct from that of interning reservists or males of fighting age, which was freely done by the Allies. It is only fair to say that after a long delay there was a release of schoolgirls, and afterwards one of doctors, by the Germans, but many harmless travellers, students, and others were held for a long period of the war at a time when tens of thousands of Germans were free in Great Britain.

By a gross perversion of facts German publicists have endeavoured to show that Great Britain was to blame for the final rupture. The pretence is too absurd to deceive any one, and one can hardly think that they believe it themselves. One has only to ask what had Great Britain to do with the death of the Heir Apparent of Austria, with the sending of the fatal ultimatum, with the declaration of war against Russia and France, or, finally, with the infraction of the Belgian frontier? She had nothing to do with any one of these things, which all, save the first, emanated from Vienna and from Berlin, and were the obvious causes of the war. Britain was only in-

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volved because she remained true to her solemn contract, a breach of which would have left her dishonoured. It is mere effrontery to pretend that she desired war, or that she left anything undone which could have prevented it. We lay our record with confidence before foreign nations and posterity. We have nothing to conceal and nothing to regret.

On the other hand, supposing that one were to grant the whole of the German contention, suppose one were to admit that Germany did not know of the terms of the Austrian ultimatum or foresee its effect upon the other nations of Europe, that she took her stand by the side of Austria purely out of motives of chivalrous loyalty to an ally, and that she was forced, by so doing, to find herself at variance with Russia and France—suppose so inconceivable a hypothesis as this, even then it cannot in any way condone the admitted wrong which Germany did in invading Belgium, nor does it show any possible cause why, because Germany was false to her word in this matter, Britain should be so also. This point is so unanswerable that the only defence, if it can be called a defence, which Germany has ever put forward is, that if she had not infringed Belgian neutrality, somebody else would have done so. Not one shadow of evidence has ever been put forward to justify so monstrous an assertion, which is certainly not endorsed by the Belgians themselves.

In this connection one may allude to the so-called secret military engagements which were found and published by the Germans at Brussels and which were supposed to show that Great Britain herself contemplated the infraction of Belgian neutrality. One can only realise how bankrupt is Germany of all

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reason and argument when one considers such a contention as this. For years the German threats had been obvious to all the world. They had brought their strategic railways to the frontier of Belgium, and erected their standing camps there. Naturally Belgium was alarmed at such preparations and took counsel with Great Britain how her pledge should be redeemed and how her soil could be defended in case Germany proved perfidious. It was a simple military precaution which involved not the breach of a treaty but the fulfilment of one—not the invasion of Belgium but its protection after it was invaded. Each successive so-called "revelation" about the actions of Great Britain has only proved once more that—

"Whatever record leaps to light
She never shall be shamed."

These attempts to confuse the issue irresistibly recall the message of Frederic to Podowils when he was about to seize Silesia even as William seized Belgium. "The question of right," he said, "is the affair of ministers. It is your affair. It is time to work at it in secret, for the orders to the troops are given." March first and find some justification later.

Germany would have stood higher in the world's esteem and in the estimate of history if, instead of playing in most grotesque fashion the wolf to the lamb, and accusing her unprepared and distracted neighbours of making a surprise attack upon her at the moment when she was at the height of her preparations, she had boldly stated her true position. Her dignity and frankness would have been undeniable, if she had said, "I am a great power. I believe I am

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the greatest. I am willing to put it to the test of war. I am not satisfied with my geographical position. I desire a greater seaboard. You must give it to me or I shall take it. I justify my action by the fact that the position of every state rests ultimately upon its strength in war, and that I am willing to undergo that test."

Such a contention would have commanded respect, however much we might resist it. But these repeated declarations from the Emperor himself, the Chancellor, and so many others that they were deliberately attacked, coupled with appeals to the Almighty, make up the most nauseous mixture of falsehood and blasphemy which the world has ever known. The whole conception of religion became grotesque, and the Almighty, instead of a universal Father of the human race, was suddenly transformed into "our good old God," a bloodthirsty tribal deity worthy of those Prussian pagans who as late as the fourteenth century offered human sacrifices to their idols in the Eastern Mark. The phenomenon was part of that general national madness to which, it is to be hoped, the German of the future will look back with bewilderment and shame.

One contention put forward by certain German apologists in connection with the war would hardly be worth referring to, were it not for the singular light which it casts upon the mental and moral position of a large number of the German public. It was that some special culture had been evolved by Germany which was of such value that it should be imposed by force upon the rest of the world. Since culture must in its nature be an international thing, the joint product of human development, such a

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claim can only be regarded as a conspicuous sign of its absence. In spiritual and intellectual matters it could not be asserted that Germany since 1870 had shown any superiority over France or England. In many matters she was conspicuously behind. It might fairly be claimed that in chemistry, in music, and in some forms of criticism, notably biblical exegesis, she was supreme. But in how many fields was she inferior to Great Britain? What name had she in poetry to put against Tennyson and Browning, in zoology to compare with Darwin, in scientific surgery to excel that of Lister, in travel to balance Stanley, or in the higher human qualities to equal such a man as Gordon? The fruits of German culture do not bear out the claim that it should forcibly supplant that of either of the great Western nations.

We have now seen how the great cloud which had hung so long over Europe burst at last, and the blast of war swept the land from end to end. We have passed through the years of hopes and alarms, of the *ententes* of optimists and the *detentes* of politicians, of skirmishes between journals and wrestles of finance, until we reach the end of it all—open primitive warfare between the two great branches of the Germanic family. In a purple passage Professor Cramb spoke of the days when the high gods of virility would smile as they looked down upon the chosen children of Odin, the English and the Germans, locked in the joy of battle. The hour had struck, and it is a partial record of those crowded and heroic days which is here set forth with such accuracy of detail as diligence may command and circumstances allow.

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CHAPTER II

THE OPENING OF THE WAR

THERE can be no doubt that if Germany had confined her operations to an attack upon France without any infraction of Belgian neutrality, the situation in Great Britain would have been extraordinarily difficult. The Government was the most democratic that has ever been known in our political history, and it owed its power to an electorate, many of whom were passionate advocates for peace at almost any conceivable price. The preparations for naval war, necessitated by the ever-growing German power, had been accompanied and occasionally retarded by a constant murmur of remonstrance which swelled periodically into a menacing expostulation. McKenna and Churchill found their only opponents in the members of their own party, who persistently refused to look obvious facts in the face, and impatiently swept aside the figures of the German armaments while they indulged in vague and amiable aspirations towards international friendship. This large and energetic party would certainly have most strenuously resisted British interference in a Continental war. The statesmen who foresaw that the conquest of France would surely lead to the conquest of Britain might have carried the country with them, but none the less they would have gone to war with such an incubus upon them

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as the traitorous Charles James Fox and his party had been in the days of Napoleon. A disunited British against a united German Empire would have been a grievous disadvantage, be our allies who they might, for, as Shakespeare sang, "If England to herself be true," it is then only that she is formidable.

This great misfortune, however, was obviated by the policy of Germany. The most peace-loving Briton could not face the national dishonour which would have been eternally branded upon him had his country without an effort allowed its guarantee to be treated as waste paper by a great military nation. The whole people were welded into one, and save for a few freakish individuals who obeyed their own perversity of mind or passion for notoriety, the country was united as it has never been in history. A just war seemed to touch the land with some magic wand, which healed all dissensions and merged into one national whole those vivid controversies which are, in fact, a sign rather of intense vitality than of degeneration. In a moment the faddist forgot his fad, the capitalist his grievance against taxation, the Labour man his feud against Capital, the Tory his hatred of the Government, even the woman her craving for the vote. A political millennium seemed to have dawned. Best and most important of all was the evident sign that the work done of late years to win the friendship of Ireland had not been in vain. If the mere promise of domestic institutions has ranged all responsible Irishmen upon one side on the day of battle, what may we hope not for ourselves and for the Empire when they have been fully established and Time has alleviated the last lingering memories of an evil

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past? It is true that at a later period of the war this fair prospect was somewhat overcast by an insane rebellion, in which the wrongs of Ireland, once formidable and now trivial, were allowed by a colossal selfishness to outweigh the martyrdom of Belgium and the mutilation of France. Still the fact remains (and it must sustain us in our future efforts for conciliation) that never before have we had the representative nationalists of Ireland as our allies in a great struggle.

The leaders of the Unionist party, Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law, had already, on August 2, signified to the Government that they considered Britain to be honour-bound to France, and would support without hesitation every practical step to give effect to the alliance. Fortified by this assurance, the Government could go strongly forward. But after the Belgian infraction, its position was that of the executive of a united nation. Sir Edward Grey's analysis in Parliament of the causes which had brought us to war convinced the reason and claimed the sympathy of every political party, and even the most fervent advocates of peace found themselves silenced in the presence of the huge German aggression which could never admit of a peace founded upon mutual respect and equality, but only of that which comes from ascendency on the one side and helplessness upon the other.

Should Britain ever be led into an unjust war, she will soon learn it from the fearless voices of her children. The independent young nations which are rising under the red-crossed flag will not be dragged, in the train of the Mother-Country, into any enterprise of which their conscience does not approve.

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But now their assent was whole-hearted. They were vehement in their approval of the firm stand made for the pledged word of the nation. From every quarter of the world deep answered deep in its assurance that the sword should not be sheathed until the wrong was righted and avenged.

Strong, earnest Canada sent her 30,000 men, with her promise of more. Fiery Australia and New Zealand prepared as many, Maori vying with white man in his loyalty to the flag. South Africa, under the splendid leadership of Botha, began to arm, to speak with the foe in her own gates. India poured forth money and men with a lavish generosity which can never be forgotten in this country. The throb of loyalty to the old land passed through every smallest Dependency, and then beyond the frontier to those further lands which had known us as a just and kindly neighbour. Newfoundland voted a contingent. Ceylon sent of her best. Little Fiji mustered her company of fighting men, and even the mountains of Nepaul and the inaccessible plateaux of Thibet were desirous of swelling that great host, gathered from many races, but all under the one banner which meant to each a just and liberal rule.

On the very eve of the outbreak of hostilities one man was added to the home establishment whose presence was worth many army corps. This was Lord Kitchener, whose boat was actually lying with steam up to bear him away upon a foreign mission, when, at the last instant, either the universal public demand or the good sense of the Government recalled him to take supreme charge of the war. It was a strange and a novel situation that a soldier who was no party politician should assume the rôle

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of War Minister in a political cabinet, but the times called for decided measures, and this was among them. From that day onwards until the dark hour which called him from his uncompleted task the passer-by who looked up at the massive front of the War Office was gladdened by the thought that somewhere in the heart of it those stern, immutable eyes were looking out at Britain's enemies, and that clear, calculating brain was working for their downfall. Slow, safe, methodical, remorseless, carefully preparing the means at every stage that led him to the distant but preordained end, he had shown, both in the Soudan and South Africa, that the race of great British generals was not yet extinct. He knew and trusted his instrument even as it knew and trusted him.

That instrument was an army which was remarkably well prepared for its work. It cannot be said that the Boer War had increased the prestige of the British forces, though only those who have studied the subject can realise how difficult was the task with which they were then faced, or how considerable an achievement it was to bring it to a success. But the campaign had left behind it a valuable legacy, all the richer because so great a proportion of the land forces had been drawn into the struggle. In 1914 a large proportion of senior officers and a considerable number of non-commissioned officers and reservists had passed through that ordeal, and learned by experience what can be done, and, even more important, what cannot be done, in face of modern rifles in skilful hands.

The lesson had been well pressed home after the war, and every general, from Lord Roberts down-

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wards, had laid emphasis upon the importance of cover and of accuracy of fire. Apart from the sound technical training of the soldiers, the administration of the Army had, after an experimental period, fallen into the hands of Lord Haldane, who has left his mark more deeply than any one since Caldwell upon the formation of the land forces. A debt of gratitude is owing to him for his clear thought and his masterful dispositions. Had he been a prophet as well as organiser, he would no doubt have held his hand before he made the smallest decrease of our regular forces; but, on the other hand, by turning our haphazard, amateurish volunteers into the workman-like Territorials, in forming the invaluable Officers' Training Corps which tapped our public schools for something better than athletic talent, and in rigidly defining our expeditionary corps and providing the special reserves for its reinforcements, he did work for which he can never adequately be thanked. The weapon which he had fashioned was now thrust into the strong right hand of the new Minister of War.

It is well to survey this weapon before we show how it was used. The total personnel of the Army with its reserves called up was about 370,000 men. Of this 160,000 were set aside as an expeditionary force, but only a portion of this number could be counted as immediately available on the outbreak of war, though the system of mobilisation had been brought to a fine point. It was hoped that three army corps numbering about 110,000 men with two divisions of cavalry, about 10,000 horsemen, would be immediately available, petty numbers as compared with the millions of the Continent, but highly

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trained professional soldiers, capable, perhaps, of turning the balance in the clash of equal hosts. The rest of the Regular Army had to provide garrisons for India, Egypt, Gibraltar, and other dependencies, but it was hoped that in time nearly all of it would be available for service.

Behind these first-line troops was the special reserve, something under 100,000 in number, who were the immediate reinforcements to fill the gaps of battle. Next in order came the Territorials, whose full complement was 340,000 men. Unhappily at this time they were nearly 100,000 under strength, and there are many who think that if the National Service League in their earnest campaign, which was inspired by a clear vision of the coming danger, had insisted upon a great enlargement of this constitutional force, instead of agitating for a complete change which presented practical and political difficulties, their efforts would have been more fruitful. These troops were raw, inexperienced, and only enlisted for home service, but with a fine spirit they set to work at once to make themselves efficient, and the great majority signified their readiness to go anywhere at the country's call. Many brigades were sent abroad at once to relieve the regulars in Egypt and India, while others were ready to join the fighting line on the Continent after a few months, where, as will be shown, they acquitted themselves remarkably well. The enthusiasm for the war rapidly sent the numbers of the Territorials up to nearly half a million. In addition to these troops there was the promise of 70,000 highly trained men (one quarter of whom were British regulars) from India. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand came forward to offer

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some 60,000 men between them, with the promise of as many more as should be called for. Brave and hardy, these were splendid raw material, though their actual technical training was not, save in some special corps, more advanced than that of the British Territorials. Altogether, the British War Lord could see, at the very beginning of hostilities, nearly 1,000,000 of men ready to his hand, though in very different stages of efficiency.

But already he had conceived the idea of a campaign of attrition, and, looking forward into the years, he was convinced that these forces were insufficient. Some entirely new *cadres* must be organised, which should have no limitations, but be as reliable an instrument as the regular forces of the Crown. With a prescience which found no counterpart either among our friends or our foes he fixed three years as a probable term for the war, and he made preparation accordingly. Early in August he called for half a million fresh volunteers for the war, and early in October he had got them. Still unsatisfied, he called for yet another half-million, and before Christmas his numbers were again complete. It was a wonderful autumn and winter in Britain. Every common and green was loud with the cries of the instructors, and bare with the tramp of the men. Nothing has ever been seen in the world's history which can compare in patriotic effort with that rally to the flag, for no bounty was offered, and no compulsion used. The spirit of the men was extraordinarily high. Regiments were filled with gentlemen who gave up every amenity of life in order to face an arduous and dangerous campaign, while even greater patriotism was shown by the countless

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thousands of miners, artisans, and other well-paid workmen who sacrificed high wages and a home life in order to serve for an indefinite time upon the humble pay of the soldier, leaving, very often, a wife and children in straitened circumstances behind them. It is at such times that a democratic country reaps the rich fruits of its democracy, for if you make the land such that it is good to live in, so also does it become good to die for. These forces could not be ready, even with the best of wills, and the most intensive culture, before the summer of 1915, but at that date, including her sea forces, Great Britain had not less than 2,000,000 volunteers under arms and ready for immediate use, a number which had risen to 4,000,000 by the end of that year, and 5,000,000 by the spring of 1916.

So much for the wise provisions of Lord Kitchener, which would have been useless had they not been supported by a stern and self-sacrificing national spirit. The crisis was met with a cold determination which gave some superficial observers the impression that the nation was listless, when it was, in truth, far too earnest for mere shoutings or flag-waving. "Wakened at last!" cried some foreign cartoon when a German outrage aroused the country for an instant to some visible gleam of wrath. A deeper observer might have known that a country which finds 5,000,000 volunteer fighters, and which, instead of putting the expenses of the war upon future generations, as was done by Germany, elects to meet a considerable proportion of them by present taxation, is in grim earnest from the start. The income tax was doubled without a remonstrance by a unanimous vote of the Commons,

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thus finding an extra £40,000,000 a year for the prosecution of the war. Other taxes were levied by which the working classes bore their fair share of the burden, and they also elicited no complaints. Before Christmas no less than £450,000,000 had been raised by a loan, a gigantic financial effort which was easily borne at a charge of 4 per cent.

But if Britain was able to face the future with confidence, both in finance and in her military preparation, it was entirely to her silent, invisible, but most efficient Navy that she owed it. By wise foresight the Grand Fleet, numbering some 400 vessels, had been assembled for Royal inspection before the storm broke and when it was but a rising cloud-bank upon the horizon. This all-important move has been attributed to Prince Louis of Battenberg, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, but it could not have been done without the hearty concurrence and co-operation of Mr. Winston Churchill, who should share the honour, even as he would have shared the blame had we been caught unawares. The so-called inspection had hardly been completed at Spithead before war was upon us, and the Fleet, ready manned, provisioned, and armed, moved straight away to take up its war stations. The main fighting squadrons vanished into a strategic mist from which they did not emerge for very many months, but it was understood that they were assembled at centres like Scapa Flow and Cromarty Firth which were outside the radius of the German torpedo-boats and smaller submarines, while they were near enough to the enemy's ports to be able to bring him to action should he emerge.

Numerous patrols of small vessels were let loose

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in the North Sea to keep in touch with our opponents, who were well known to be both daring and active. It is said that no less than 3000 ships, large and small, were flying the white ensign of St. George. A portion of these were told off for the protection of the great commercial sea-routes, and for the hunting down of some score of German cruisers which were known to be at sea. Some of these gave a very good account of themselves and others were innocuous; but the net result in loss, which had been discounted in advance as 5 per cent of the merchant fleet at sea, worked out at less than half that figure, and, by the new year, the marauders had been practically exterminated.

Now as always—but now more than ever in the past—it was absolutely vital to hold the seas. Who wins the sea wins Britain. Of every five loaves in the country four come to us from abroad, and our position in meat is no better. It is victory or starvation when we fight upon the sea. It is ill to play for such stakes, however safe the game—worse still when it is a game where the value of some of the cards is unknown. We have little to fear from a raid, nothing from invasion, everything from interference with our commerce. It is one of the points in which our party politics which blind so many people to reason, might well have brought absolute ruin upon the country. The cultivation of British food supplies should never have been a question of free trade or protection, but rather of vital national insurance.

Had the war come ten years later we might have been in deadly danger, owing to the rapidly growing power of the submarine. These engines turned upon

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our food-carriers might well have starved us out, especially if we had continued our national folly in being scared by bogeys from building a Channel tunnel. But by a merciful Providence the struggle came at a moment when the submarine was half developed, and had not yet reached either the speed or the range of action which would make it the determining factor in a war. As it was, the fruits of submarine warfare, in spite of a wise and timely warning on the eve of hostilities by Admiral Sir Percy Scott, astonished the public, but the mischief done was a very small thing compared to the possibilities which have to be most carefully guarded against in the future.

In their present stage of development, the submarine could only annoy. With the great fleet in existence and with the shipbuilding facilities of Great Britain, nothing could vitally harm her save the loss of a pitched battle. The British superiority was rather in her small craft than in her large ones, but in capital ships she was able to place in line at the beginning of the war enough to give a sufficient margin of insurance. There was never any tendency to underrate the excellence of the hostile ships, nor the courage and efficiency of the men. It was well understood that when they came out they would give a good account of themselves, and also that they would not come out until the circumstances seemed propitious. They were under a disadvantage in that the Russian fleet, though small, was not negligible, and therefore some portion of the German force on sea as well as on land had always to face eastwards. Also the British had the French for their allies, and, though the great ships of the

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latter were nearly all in the Mediterranean, a swarm of small craft was ready to buzz out of her western ports should the war come down-channel.

Yet another advantage lay with the British in that their geographical position put a six-hundred-mile-long breakwater right across the entrance to Germany, leaving only two sally-ports north and south by which commerce could enter or raiders escape. The result was the immediate utter annihilation of Germany's sea-borne commerce. Altogether it must be admitted that Germany was grievously handicapped at sea, and that she deserves the more credit for whatever she accomplished, save when, as on land, she transgressed and degraded the recognised laws of civilised warfare. It is time now to turn to those military events upon the Continent which were the precursors of that British campaign which is the subject of this volume.

Want of space and accurate material make it impossible to do justice here to the deeds of our Allies, but an attempt must be made to indicate briefly the main phases of the struggle abroad, since its course reacted continually upon the British operations. It may be shortly stated, then, that so far as the western theatre of war was concerned, hostilities commenced by two movements, one an attack by the French upon the occupants of those lost provinces for which they had mourned during forty-four years, and the other the advance of the Germans over the Belgian frontier.

The former was a matter of no great importance. It took two distinct lines, the one from the Belfort region into Alsace, and the other from Nancy as a centre into Lorraine. The Alsatian venture gained

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some ground which was never wholly lost, and was adorned by one small victory near Mülhausen before it was checked by the German defence. The Lorraine advance had also some initial success, but was finally thrown back on August 20 in a severe action in which the French were defeated. Luneville, across the French frontier, was occupied by the Germans, but they made no headway, and their subsequent attempts upon Nancy were repulsed by the army of General Castelnau. General Pau, a fiery, one-armed septuagenarian, was the French leader in the Alsatian invasion, but it was soon realised by General Joffre that he and the bulk of his men would be more useful at the vital point upon the northern frontier, to which early in September they were transferred.

The main drama, however, quickly unfolded upon the Belgian frontier. Speed and secrecy were vital to the German plans. On July 31, before any declaration of war, and while the German representative at Brussels was perjuring his soul in his country's service by representing that no infringement was possible, three German army corps, the seventh, ninth, and tenth, fully mobilised and highly equipped, were moving up from their quarters so as to be ready for a treacherous pounce upon their little neighbour whom they were pledged to defend. Von Emmich was in command. On the night of Saturday, August 1, the vanguard of the German armies, using motor traffic followed by trains, burst through the neutral Duchy of Luxemburg, and on August 3 they were over the Belgian line at Verviers. The long-meditated crime had been done, and, with loud appeals to God, Germany began her fatal

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campaign by deliberate perjury and arrogant disdain for treaties. God accepted the appeal, and swiftly showed how the weakest State with absolute right upon its side may bring to naught all the crafty plottings of the strong.

For time was the essence of the situation. For this the innumerable motors, for this the light equipment and the lack of transport. It was on, on, at top speed, that there be no hindrance in the path of the great hosts that soon would be closing up behind. But time was life and death for the French also, with their slower mobilisation, their backward preparation, and their expectations from Great Britain. Time was the precious gift which little Belgium gave to the Allies. She gave them days and days, and every day worth an army corps. The Germans had crossed the Meuse, had taken Visé, and then had rushed at Liége, even as the Japanese had rushed at Port Arthur. With all their military lore, they had not learned the lesson which was taught so clearly in 1904—that a fortress is taken by skill and not by violence alone.

Leman, a great soldier, defended the forts built by Brialmont. Both defender and designer were justified of their work. On August 5 the seventh German Corps attempted to rush the gaps between the forts. These gaps were three miles wide, but were filled with entrenched infantry. The attack was boldly pressed home, but it completely failed. The German loss was considerable. Two other corps were called up, and again on August 7 the attack was renewed, but with no better result. The defenders fought as befitted the descendants of those Belgae whom Caesar pronounced to be the brav-

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est of the Gauls, or of that Walloon Guard which had so great a mediaeval reputation. There were 25,000 in the town and 120,000 outside, but they were still outside at the end of the assault.

Liége, however, had one fatal weakness. Its garrison was far too small to cover the ground. With twelve forts three miles apart it is clear that there were intervals of, roughly, thirty-six miles to be covered, and that a garrison of 25,000 men, when you had deducted the gunners for the forts, hardly left the thinnest skirmish line to cover the ground. So long as the Germans attacked upon a narrow front they could be held. The instant that they spread out there were bound to be places where they could march almost unopposed into the town. This was what occurred. The town was penetrated, but the forts were intact. General Leman, meanwhile, seeing that the town itself was indefensible, had sent the garrison out before the place was surrounded. Many a Belgian soldier fought upon the Yser and helped to turn the tide of that crowning conflict who would have been a prisoner in Germany had it not been for the foresight and the decision of General Leman.

The Germans were in the town upon the 8th, but the forts still held out and the general advance was grievously impeded. Day followed day, and each beyond price to the Allies. Germany had secretly prepared certain monstrous engines of war—one more proof, if proof were needed, that the conflict had been prearranged and deliberately provoked. These were huge cannon of a dimension never before cast—42 centimetres in bore. More mobile and hardly less effective were some smaller howitzers of

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28-centimetre calibre said to have come from the Austrian foundries at Skoda. Brialmont, when he erected his concrete and iron cupolas, had not foreseen the Thor's hammer which would be brought to crush them. One after another they were smashed like eggs. The heroic Leman was dug out from under the débris of the last fort and lived to tell of his miraculous escape. Liége was at last in the hands of the invaders. But already the second week of August was at an end—the British were crowding into France, the French line was thickening along the frontier—all was well with the Allies. Little David had left a grievous mark upon Goliath.

The German mobilisation was now complete, and the whole vast host, over a million strong, poured over the frontier. Never was seen such an army, so accurate and scientific in its general conception, so perfect in its detail. Nothing had been omitted from its equipment which the most thorough of nations, after years of careful preparation, could devise. In motor transport, artillery, machine guns, and all the technique of war they were unrivalled. The men themselves were of high heart and grand physique. By some twisted process of reasoning founded upon false information they had been persuaded that this most aggressive and unnecessary of wars was in some way a war of self-defence, for it was put to them that unless they attacked their neighbours now, their neighbours would certainly some day or other attack them. Hence, they were filled with patriotic ardour and a real conviction that they were protecting their beloved Fatherland. One could not but admire their self-sacrificing devotion, though in the dry light of truth and reason they stood forth

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as the tools of tyranny, the champions of barbarous political reaction and the bullies of Europe. It was an ominous fact that the troops were provided in advance with incendiary discs for the firing of dwellings, which shows that the orgy of destruction and cruelty which disgraced the name of the German Army in Belgium and in the north of France was prearranged by some central force, whose responsibility in this matter can only be described as terrific. They brought the world of Christ back to the days of Odin, and changed a civilised campaign to an inroad of pagan Danes. This wicked central force could only be the Chief Staff of the Army, and in the last instance the Emperor himself. Had Napoleon conducted his campaigns with as little scruple as William II., it can safely be said that Europe as we know it would hardly exist to-day, and the monuments of antiquity and learning would have been wiped from the face of the globe. It is an evil precedent to be expunged from the records for ever—all the more evil because it was practised by a strong nation on a weak one and on a defenceless people by one which had pledged themselves to defend them. That it was in no wise caused by any actions upon the part of the Belgians is clearly proved by the fact that similar atrocities were committed by the German army the moment they crossed the frontiers both of France and of Poland.

The Allies had more than they expected from Liége. They had less from Namur. The grey-green tide of German invasion had swept the Belgian resistance before it, had flooded into Brussels, and had been dammed for only a very few days by the great frontier fortress, though it was counted as

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stronger than Liége. The fact was that the Germans had now learned their lesson. Never again would they imagine that the *Furor Teutonicus* alone could carry a walled city. The fatal guns were brought up again and the forts were crushed with mechanical precision, while the defenders between the forts, after enduring for ten hours a severe shelling, withdrew from their trenches. On August 22 the fortress surrendered, some of General Michel's garrison being taken, but a considerable proportion effecting its retreat with the French Army which had come up to support the town. By the third week of August the remains of the Belgian forces had taken refuge in Antwerp, and the Germans, having made a wide sweep with their right wing through Brussels, were descending in a two-hundred-mile line upon Northern France.

The French plans had in truth been somewhat disarranged by the Belgian resistance, for the chivalrous spirit of the nation would not permit that their gallant friends be unsupported. Fresh dispositions had been made, but the sudden fall of Namur brought them to naught. Before that untoward event the French had won a small but indubitable victory at Dinant, and had advanced their line from Namur on the right to Charleroi on the left. With the fall of Namur their long wall had lost its corner bastion, and they were at once vigorously attacked, by all the German armies, who forced the Sambre on August 22, carried Charleroi, and pushed the French back with considerable loss of guns and prisoners along the whole line. There was defeat, but there was nothing in the nature of a rout or of an envelopment. The line fell back fighting tooth and

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nail, but none the less Northern France was thrown open to the invaders. In this general movement the British forces were involved, and we now turn to a more particular and detailed account of what befell them during these most momentous days.

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CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF MONS

The landing of the British in France—The British leaders—The advance to Mons—The defence of the bridges of Nimy—The holding of the Canal—The fateful telegram—The rearguard actions of Frameries, Wasmes, and Dour—The charge of the Lancers—The fate of the Cheshires—The Seventh Brigade at Solesmes—The Guards in action—The German's rude awakening—The Connaughts at Pont-sur-Sambre.

THE bulk of the British Expeditionary Force passed over to France under cover of darkness on the nights of August 12 and 13, 1914. The movement, which included four infantry divisions and a cavalry division, necessitated the transportation of approximately 90,000 men, 15,000 horses, and 400 guns. It is doubtful if so large a host has ever been moved by water in so short a time in all the annals of military history. There was drama in the secrecy and celerity of the affair. Two canvas walls converging into a funnel screened the approaches to Southampton Dock. All beyond was darkness and mystery. Down this fatal funnel passed the flower of the youth of Britain, and their folk saw them no more. They had embarked upon the great adventure of the German War. The crowds in the streets saw the last serried files vanish into the darkness of the docks, heard the measured tramp upon the stone quays dying farther away in the silence of the night,

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until at last all was still and the great steamers were pushing out into the darkness.

No finer force for technical efficiency, and no body of men more hot-hearted in their keen desire to serve their country, have ever left the shores of Britain. It is a conservative estimate to say that within four months a half of their number were either dead or in the hospitals. They were destined for great glory, and for that great loss which is the measure of their glory.

Belated pedestrians upon the beach of the southern towns have recorded their impression of that amazing spectacle. In the clear summer night the wall of transports seemed to stretch from horizon to horizon. Guardian warships flanked the mighty column, while swift shadows shooting across the surface of the sea showed where the torpedo boats and scouts were nosing and ferreting for any possible enemy. But far away, hundreds of miles to the north, lay the real protection of the flotilla, where the smooth waters of the Heligoland Bight were broken by the sudden rise and dip of the blockading periscopes.

It is well to state, once for all, the composition of this force, so that in the succeeding pages, when a brigade or division is under discussion, the diligent reader may ascertain its composition. This, then, is the First Army which set forth to France. Others will be chronicled as they appeared upon the scene of action. It may be remarked that the formation of units was greatly altered with the progress of the campaign, so that it has been possible without indiscretion to raise the veil of secrecy which was once so essential.

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THE FIRST ARMY CORPS—GENERAL HAIG

DIVISION I.

General LOMAX.

1st Infantry Brigade —General Maxse.
1st Coldstream.
1st Scots Guards.
1st Black Watch.
2nd Munster Fusiliers.

2nd Infantry Brigade —General Bulfin.
2nd Sussex.
1st N. Lancs.
1st Northampton.
2nd K. R. Rifles.

3rd Infantry Brigade —General Landon.
1st West Surrey (Queen's).
1st S. Wales Borderers.
1st Gloucester.
2nd Welsh.

Artillery— Colonel Findlay.
25th Brig. R.F.A. 113, 114, 115.
26th Brig. R.F.A. 116, 117, 118.
39th Brig. R.F.A. 46, 51, 54.
43rd (H o w.) Brig. R.F.A. 30, 40, 57.

Engineers—

Colonel Schreiber.

23 F. Co.
26 F. Co.
1 Signal Co.

DIVISION II.

General MUNRO.

4th Infantry Brigade —General Scott-Kerr.
2nd Grenadier Guards.
2nd Coldstream.
3rd Coldstream.
1st Irish.

5th Infantry Brigade —General Haking.
2nd Worcester.
2nd Ox. and Bucks L.I.
2nd Highland L.I.
2nd Connaught Rangers.

6th Infantry Brigade —General Davies.
1st Liverpool (King's).
2nd S. Stafford.
1st Berks.
1st K.R. Rifles.

Artillery— General Perceval.
34th Brig. R.F.A. 22, 50, 70.
36th Brig. R.F.A. 15, 48, 71.
41st Brig. R.F.A. 9, 16, 17.
How. Brig. R.F.A. 47, 56, 60.
35th Batt. R.G.A.
R.E. 5, 11, Field Cos.

THE SECOND ARMY CORPS—GENERAL SMITH-DORRIEN

DIVISION III.

General HAMILTON.

7th Infantry Brigade —General McCracken.
3rd Worcester.
2nd S. Lancs.
1st Wilts.
2nd Irish Rifles.

8th Infantry Brigade— General B. Doran.
2nd Royal Scots.
2nd Royal Irish.
4th Middlesex.
1st Gordon Highlanders.

9th Infantry Brigade— General Shaw.
1st North. Fusiliers.
4th Royal Fusiliers.
1st Lincoln.
1st Scots Fusiliers.

Artillery— General Wing.
23rd Brigade 107, 108, 109.
30th Brigade (How.) 128, 129, 130.
40th Brigade 6, 23, 49.
42nd Brigade 29, 41, 45.
48th Batt. R.G.A.

R.E.—Colonel Wilson.
56, 57 F. Corps.
3 Signal Co.

DIVISION V.

General FERGUSON.

13th Infantry Brigade —General Cuthbert.
2nd K.O. Scot. Bord.
2nd West Riding.
1st West Kent.
2nd Yorks. Light Infantry.

14th Infantry Brigade —General Rolt.
2nd Suffolk.
1st East Surrey.
1st D. of Cornwall's L.I.
2nd Manchester.

15th Infantry Brigade —General Gleichen.
1st Norfolk.
1st Bedford.
1st Cheshire.
1st Dorset.

Artillery— General Headlam.
15th Brig. R.F.A. 11, 52, 80.
27th Brig. R.F.A. 119, 120,121.
28th Brig. R.F.A. 122, 123, 124.
8 How. Brig. 37, 61, 65.
Heavy G.A. 108 Battery.

R.E.—Colonel Tulloch.
17th & 59th Field Cost.
5 Signal Co.

The Cavalry consisted of four Brigades forming the first cavalry division, and of one extra Brigade. They were made up thus:

1st *Cavalry Brigade* (*Briggs*).—2nd and 5th Dragoon Guards; 11th Hussars.

2nd *Cavalry Brigade* (*De Lisle*).—4th Dragoon Guards; 9th Lancers; 18th Hussars.

3rd *Cavalry Brigade* (*Gough*).—4th Hussars; 5th Lancers; 16th Lancers.

4th *Cavalry Brigade* (*Bingham*).—3rd Hussars; 6th Dragoon Guards; Comp. Guards Regt.

5th *Cavalry Brigade* (*Chetwode*).—Scots Greys; 12th Lancers; 20th Hussars.

D, E, I, J, and L batteries of Horse Artillery were attached to these Brigades.

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Such was the Army which first set forth to measure itself against the soldiers of Germany. Prussian bravery, capacity, and organising power had a high reputation among us, and yet we awaited the result with every confidence, if the odds of numbers were not overwhelming. It was generally known that during the period since the last war the training of the troops had greatly progressed, and many of the men, with nearly all the senior officers, had had experience in the arduous campaign of South Africa. They could also claim those advantages which volunteer troops may hope to have over conscripts. At the same time there was no tendency to underrate the earnest patriotism of our opponents, and we were well aware that even the numerous Socialists who filled their ranks were persuaded, incredible as it may seem, that the Fatherland was really attacked, and were whole-hearted in its defence.

The crossing was safely effected. It has always been the traditional privilege of the British public to grumble at their public servants and to speak of "muddling through" to victory. No doubt the criticism has often been deserved. But on this occasion the supervising General in command, the British War Office, and the Naval Transport Department all rose to a supreme degree of excellence in their arrangements. So too did the Railway Companies concerned. The details were meticulously correct. Without the loss of man, horse, or gun, the soldiers who had seen the sun set in Hampshire saw it rise in Picardy or in Normandy. Boulogne and Havre were the chief ports of disembarkation, but many, including the cavalry, went up the Seine and came ashore at Rouen. The soldiers everywhere received a rap-

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turous welcome from the populace, which they returned by a cheerful sobriety of behaviour. The admirable precepts as to wine and women set forth in Lord Kitchener's parting orders to the Army seem to have been most scrupulously observed. It is no slight upon the gallantry of France—the very home of gallantry—if it be said that she profited greatly at this strained, over-anxious time by the arrival of these boisterous over-sea Allies. The tradition of British solemnity has been for ever killed by these jovial invaders. It is probable that the beautiful tune, and even the paltry words of "Tipperary" will pass into history as the marching song, and often the death-dirge of that gallant host. The dusty, poplar-lined roads resounded with their choruses, and the quiet Picardy villages re-eoched their thunderous and superfluous assurances as to the state of their hearts. All France broke into a smile at the sight of them, and it was at a moment when a smile meant much to France.

Whilst the various brigades were with some deliberation preparing for an advance up-country, there arrived at the Gare du Nord in Paris a single traveller who may be said to have been the most welcome British visitor who ever set foot in the city. He was a short, thick man, tanned by an outdoor life, a solid, impassive personality with a strong, good-humoured face, the forehead of a thinker above it, and the jaw of an obstinate fighter below. Overhung brows shaded a pair of keen grey eyes, while the strong, set mouth was partly concealed by a grizzled moustache. Such was John French, leader of cavalry in Africa and now Field-Marshal commanding the Expeditionary Forces of Britain. His

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defence of Colesberg at a critical period when he bluffed the superior Boer forces, his dashing relief of Kimberley, and especially the gallant way in which he had thrown his exhausted cavalry across the path of Cronje's army in order to hold it while Roberts pinned it down at Paardeberg, were all exploits which were fresh in the public mind, and gave the soldiers confidence in their leader.

French might well appreciate the qualities of his immediate subordinates. Both of his army corps and his cavalry division were in good hands. Haig, like his leader, was a cavalry man by education, though now entrusted with the command of the First Army Corps, and destined for an ever-increasing European reputation. Fifty-four years of age, he still preserved all his natural energies, whilst he had behind him long years of varied military experience, including both the Soudanese and the South African campaigns, in both of which he had gained high distinction. He had the advantage of thoroughly understanding the mind of his commander, as he had worked under him as Chief of the Staff in his remarkable operations round Colesberg in those gloomy days which opened the Boer War.

The Second Army Corps sustained a severe loss before ever it reached the field of action, for its commander, General Grierson, died suddenly of heart failure in the train between Havre and Rouen upon August 18. Grierson had been for many years Military Attaché in Berlin, and one can well imagine how often he had longed to measure British soldiers against the self-sufficient critics around him. At the very last moment the ambition of his lifetime was denied him. His place, however, was worthily filled

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by General Smith-Dorrien, another South African veteran whose brigade in that difficult campaign had been recognised as one of the very best. Smith-Dorrien was a typical Imperial soldier in the world-wide character of his service, for he had followed the flag, and occasionally preceded it, in Zululand, Egypt, the Soudan, Chitral, and the Tirah before the campaign against the Boers. A sportsman as well as a soldier, he had very particularly won the affections of the Aldershot division by his system of trusting to their honour rather than to compulsion in matters of discipline. It was seldom indeed that his confidence was abused.

Haig and Smith-Dorrien were the two generals upon whom the immediate operations were to devolve, for the Third Army Corps was late, through no fault of its own, in coming into line. There remained the Cavalry Division commanded by General Allenby, who was a column leader in that great class for mounted tactics held in South Africa a dozen years before. It is remarkable that of the four leaders in the initial operations of the German War—French, Smith-Dorrien, Haig, and Allenby—three belonged to the cavalry, an arm which has usually been regarded as active and ornamental rather than intellectual. Pulteney, the commander of the Third Army Corps, was a product of the Guards, a veteran of much service and a well-known heavy-game shot. Thus, neither of the more learned corps were represented among the higher commanders upon the actual field of battle, but brooding over the whole operations was the steadfast, untiring brain of Joffre, whilst across the water the silent Kitchener, remorseless as Destiny, moved the

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forces of the Empire to the front. The last word in each case lay with the sappers.

The general plan of campaign was naturally in the hands of General Joffre, since he was in command of far the greater portion of the Allied Force. It has been admitted in France that the original dispositions might be open to criticism, since a number of the French troops had engaged themselves in Alsace and Lorraine to the weakening of the line of battle in the north, where the fate of Paris was to be decided. It is small profit to a nation to injure its rival ever so grievously in the toe when it is itself in imminent danger of being stabbed to the heart. A further change in plan had been caused by the intense sympathy felt both by the French and the British for the gallant Belgians, who had done so much and gained so many valuable days for the Allies. It was felt that it would be unchivalrous not to advance and do what was possible to relieve the intolerable pressure which was crushing them. It was resolved, therefore, to abandon the plan which had been formed, by which the Germans should be led as far as possible from their base, and to attack them at once. For this purpose the French army changed its whole dispositions, which had been formed on the idea of an attack from the east, and advanced over the Belgian frontier, getting into touch with the enemy at Namur and Charleroi, so as to secure the passages of the Sambre. It was in fulfilling its part as the left of the Allied line that on August 18 and 19 the British troops began to move northwards into Belgium. The First Army Corps advanced through Le Nouvion, St. Remy, and Maubeuge to Rouveroy, which is a village upon the Mons-

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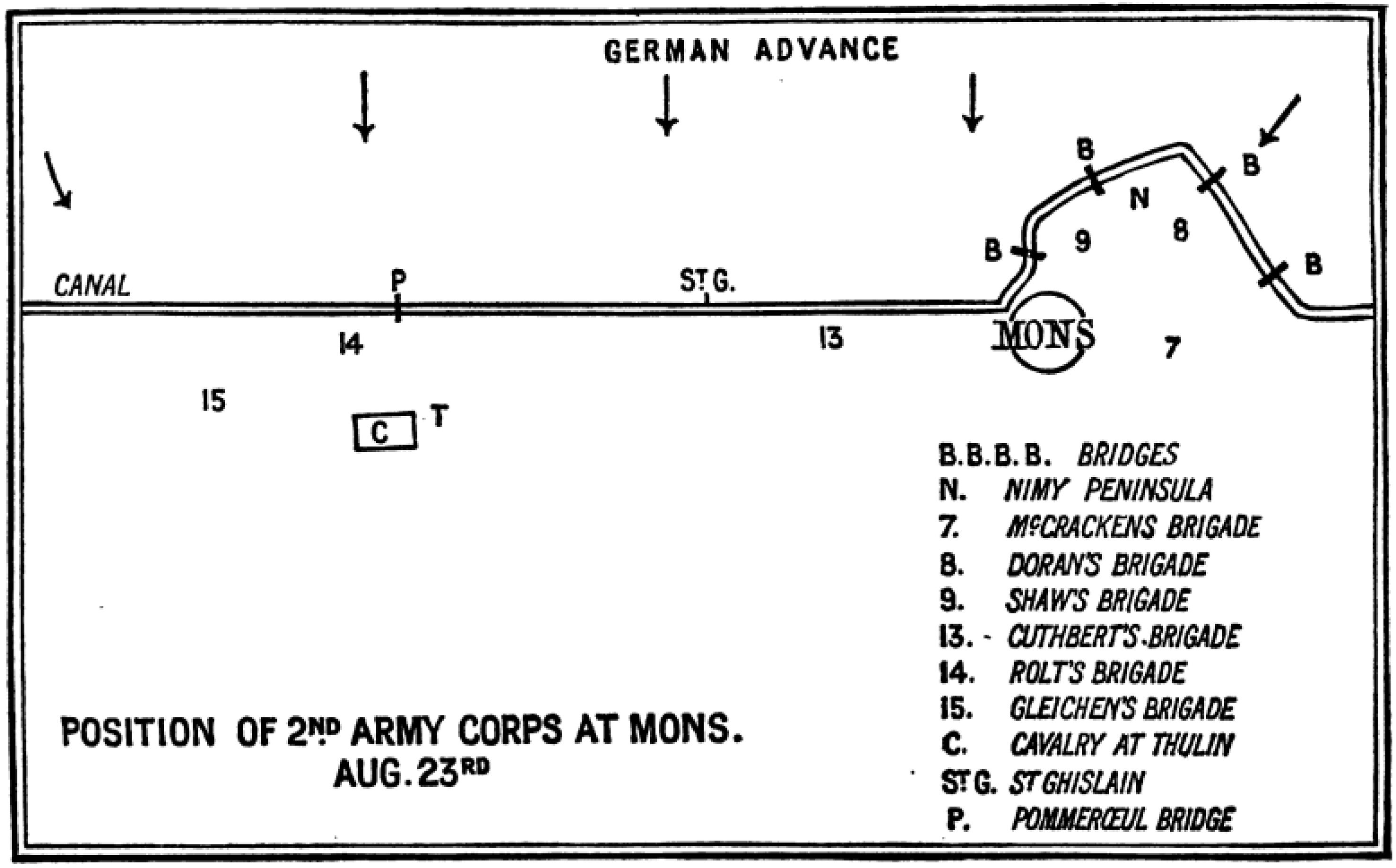

B.B.B.B. *BRIDGES*
N. *NIMY PENINSULA*
7. *McCRACKENS BRIGADE*
8. *DORAN'S BRIGADE*
9. *SHAW'S BRIGADE*
13. *CUTHBERT'S BRIGADE*
14. *ROLT'S BRIGADE*
15. *GLEICHEN'S BRIGADE*
C. *CAVALRY AT THULIN*
St G. *ST GHISLAIN*
P. *POMMEREUL BRIDGE*

POSITION OF 2ND ARMY CORPS AT MONS.
AUG. 23RD

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Chimay road. There it linked on to the right of the Second Corps, which had moved up to the line of the Condé-Mons Canal. On the morning of Sunday, August 23, all these troops were in position. The 5th Brigade of Cavalry (Chetwode's) lay out upon the right front at Binche, but the remainder of the cavalry was brought to a point about five miles behind the centre of the line, so as to be able to reinforce either flank. The first blood of the land campaign had been drawn upon August 22 outside Soignies, when a reconnoitring squadron of the 4th Dragoon Guards under Captain Hornby charged and overthrew a body of the 4th German Cuirassiers, bringing back some prisoners. The 20th Hussars had enjoyed a similar experience. It was a small but happy omen.

The advance to Mons.

The forces which now awaited the German attack numbered about 86,000 men, who may be roughly divided into 76,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry, and 312 guns. The general alignment was as follows: The First Army Corps held the space between Mons and Binche, which was soon contracted to Bray as the eastward limit. Close to Mons, where the attack was expected to break, since the town is a point of considerable strategic importance, there was a thickening of the line of defence. From that point the Third Division and the Fifth, in the order named, carried on the British formation down the length of the Mons-Condé Canal. The front of the Army covered nearly twenty miles, an excessive strain upon so small a force in the presence of a compact enemy.

If one looks at the general dispositions, it becomes clear that Sir John French was preparing for an

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attack upon his right flank. From all his information the enemy was to the north and to the east of him, so that if they set about turning his position it must be from the Charleroi direction. Hence, his right wing was laid back at an angle to the rest of his line, and the only cavalry which he kept in advance was thrown out to Binche in front of this flank. The rest of the cavalry was on the day of battle drawn in behind the centre of the Army, but as danger began to develop upon the left flank it was sent across in that direction, so that on the morning of the 24th it was at Thulin, at the westward end of the line.

The line of the canal was a most tempting position to defend from Condé to Mons, for it ran as straight as a Roman road across the path of an invader. But it was very different at Mons itself. Here it formed a most awkward loop. A glance at the diagram will show this formation. It was impossible to leave it undefended, and yet troops who held it were evidently subjected to a flanking artillery fire from each side. The canal here was also crossed by at least three substantial road bridges and one railway bridge. This section of the defence was under the immediate direction of General Smith-Dorrien, who at once took steps to prepare a second line of defence, thrown back to the right rear of the town, so that if the canal were forced the British array would remain unbroken. The immediate care of this weak point in the position was committed to General Beauchamp Doran's 8th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Royal Scots, 2nd Royal Irish, 4th Middlesex, and 1st Gordon Highlanders. On their left, occupying the village of Nimy and the

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western side of the peninsula, as well as the immediate front of Mons itself, was the 9th Brigade (Shaw's), containing the 4th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, together with the 1st Lincolns. To the left of this brigade, occupying the eastern end of the Mons-Condé line of canal, was Cuthbert's 13th Brigade, containing the 2nd Scottish Borderers, 2nd West Ridings, 1st West Kents, and 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry. It was on these three brigades, and especially on the 8th and 9th, that the impact of the German army was destined to fall. Beyond them, scattered somewhat thinly along the line of the Mons-Condé Canal from the railway bridge west of St. Ghislain, were the two remaining brigades of the Fifth Division, the 14th (Rolt's) and the 15th (Gleichen's), the latter being in divisional reserve. Still farther to the west the head of the newly-arrived 19th Brigade just touched the canal, and was itself in touch with French cavalry at Condé. Sundry units of artillery and field hospitals had not yet come up, but otherwise the two corps were complete.

Having reached their ground, the troops, with no realisation of immediate danger, proceeded to make shallow trenches. Their bands had not been brought to the front, but the universal singing from one end of the line to the other showed that the men were in excellent spirits. Cheering news had come in from the cavalry, detachments of which, as already stated, had ridden out as far as Soignies, meeting advance patrols of the enemy and coming back with prisoners and trophies. The guns were drawn up in concealed positions within half a mile of the line of bat-

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tle. All was now ready, and officers could be seen on every elevation peering northwards through their glasses for the first sign of the enemy. It was a broken country, with large patches of woodland and green spaces between. There were numerous slag-heaps from old mines, with here and there a factory and here and there a private dwelling, but the sappers had endeavoured in the short time to clear a field of fire for the infantry. In order to get this field of fire in so closely built a neighbourhood, several of the regiments, such as the West Kents of the 13th and the Cornwalls of the 14th Brigades, had to take their positions across the canal with bridges in their rear. Thrilling with anticipation, the men waited for their own first entrance upon the stupendous drama. They were already weary and footsore, for they had all done at least two days of forced marching, and the burden of the pack, the rifle, and the hundred and fifty rounds per man was no light one. They lay snugly in their trenches under the warm August sun and waited. It was a Sunday, and more than one have recorded in their letters how in that hour of tension their thoughts turned to the old home church and the mellow call of the village bells.

A hovering aeroplane had just slid down with the news that the roads from the north were alive with the advancing Germans, but the estimate of the aviator placed them at two corps and a division of cavalry. This coincided roughly with the accounts brought in by the scouts and, what was more important, with the forecast of General Joffre. Secure in the belief that he was flanked upon one side by the 5th French Army, and on the other by a screen of

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French cavalry, whilst his front was approached by a force not appreciably larger than his own, General French had no cause for uneasiness. Had his airmen taken a wider sweep to the north and west,[1] or had the French commander among his many pressing preoccupations been able to give an earlier warning to his British colleague, the trenches would, no doubt, have been abandoned before a grey coat had appeared, and the whole Army brought swiftly to a position of strategical safety. Even now, as they waited expectantly for the enemy, a vast steel trap was closing up for their destruction.

Let us take a glance at what was going on over that northern horizon. The American Powell had seen something of the mighty right swing which was to end the combat. Invited to a conference with a German general who was pursuing the national policy of soothing the United States until her own turn should come round, Mr. Powell left Brussels and chanced to meet Von Kluck's legions upon their western and southerly trek. He describes with great force the effect upon his mind of those endless grey columns, all flowing in the same direction, double files of infantry on either side of the road, and endless guns, motor-cars, cavalry, and transport between. The men, as he describes them, were all in the prime of life, and equipped with everything which years of forethought could devise. He was dazed and awed by the tremendous procession, its majesty and its self-evident efficiency. It is no wonder, for he was looking at the chosen legions of the

[1] An American correspondent, Mr. Harding Davis, actually saw a shattered British aeroplane upon the ground in this region. Its destruction may have been of great strategic importance. This aviator was probably the first British soldier to fall in the Continental War.

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most wonderful army that the world had ever seen —an army which represented the last possible word on the material and mechanical side of war. High in the van a Taube aeroplane, like an embodiment of that black eagle which is the fitting emblem of a warlike and rapacious race, pointed the path for the German hordes.

A day or two before, two American correspondents, Irvin S. Cobb and Richard Harding Davis, had seen the same great army as it streamed westwards through Louvain and Brussels. They graphically describe how for three consecutive days and the greater part of three nights they poured past, giving the impression of unconquerable energy and efficiency, young, enthusiastic, wonderfully equipped. "Either we shall go forward or we die. We do not expect to fall back ever. If the generals would let them, the men would run to Paris instead of walking there." So spoke one of the leaders of that huge invading host, the main part of which was now heading straight for the British line. A second part, unseen and unsuspected, were working round by Tournai to the west, hurrying hard to strike in upon the British flank and rear. The German is a great marcher as well as a great fighter, and the average rate of progress was little less than thirty miles a day.

It was after ten o'clock when scouting cavalry were observed falling back. Then the distant sound of a gun was heard, and a few seconds later a shell burst some hundreds of yards behind the British lines. The British guns one by one roared into action. A cloud of smoke rose along the line of the woods in front from the bursting shrapnel, but

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nothing could be seen of the German gunners. The defending guns were also well concealed. Here and there, from observation points upon buildings and slag-heaps, the controllers of the batteries were able to indicate targets and register hits unseen by the gunners themselves. The fire grew warmer and warmer as fresh batteries dashed up and unlimbered on either side. The noise was horrible, but no enemy had been seen by the infantry, and little damage done.

But now an ill-omened bird flew over the British lines. Far aloft across the deep blue sky skimmed the dark Taube, curved, turned, and sailed northwards again. It had marked the shells bursting beyond the trenches. In an instant, by some devilish cantrip of signal or wireless, it had set the range right. A rain of shells roared and crashed along the lines of the shallow trenches. The injuries were not yet numerous, but they were inexpressibly ghastly. Men who had hardly seen worse than a cut finger in their lives gazed with horror at the gross mutilations around them. "One dared not look sideways," said one of them. Stretcher-bearers bent and heaved while wet, limp forms were hoisted upwards by their comrades. Officers gave short, sharp words of encouragement or advice. The minutes seemed very long, and still the shells came raining down. The men shoved the five-fold clips down into their magazines and waited with weary patience. A senior officer peering over the end of a trench leaned tensely forward and rested his glasses upon the grassy edge. "They're coming!" he whispered to his neighbour. It ran from lip to lip along the line of crouching men. Heads were poked up here

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and there above the line of broken earth. Soon, in spite of the crashing shells overhead, there was a fringe of peering faces. And there at last in front of them was the German enemy. After all the centuries, Briton and Teuton faced each other at last for the test of battle.

A stylist among letter-writers has described that oncoming swarm as grey clouds drifting over green fields. They had deployed under cover whilst the batteries were preparing their path, and now over an extended front to the north-west of Mons they were breaking out from the woods and coming rapidly onwards. The men fidgeted with their triggers, but no order came to fire. The officers were gazing with professional interest and surprise at the German formations. Were these the tactics of the army which had claimed to be the most scientific in Europe? British observers had seen it in peace-time and had conjectured that it was a screen for some elaborate tactics held up for the day of battle. Yet here they were, advancing in what in old Soudan days used to be described as the twenty-acre formation, against the best riflemen in Europe. It was not even a shoulder to shoulder column, but a mere crowd, shredding out in the front and dense to the rear. There was nothing of the swiftly weaving lines, the rushes of alternate companies, the twinkle and flicker of a modern attack. It was mediaeval, and yet it was impressive also in its immediate display of numbers and the ponderous insistence of its onward flow. It was not many weeks before the stern lesson of war taught very different formations to those of the grand Kaiser manœuvres.

The men, still fingering their triggers, gazed ex-

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pectantly at their officers, who measured intently the distance of the approaching swarms. The Germans had already begun to fire in a desultory fashion. Shrapnel was bursting thickly along the head of their columns but they were coming steadily onwards. Suddenly a rolling wave of independent firing broke out from the British position. At some portions of the line the enemy were at eight hundred, at others at one thousand yards. The men, happy in having something definite to do, snuggled down earnestly to their work and fired swiftly but deliberately into the approaching mass. Rifles, machine-guns, and field-pieces were all roaring together, while the incessant crash of the shells overhead added to the infernal uproar. Men lost all sense of time as they thrust clip after clip into their rifles. The German swarms staggered on bravely under that leaden sleet. Then they halted, vacillated, and finally thinned, shredded out, and drifted backwards like a grey fog torn by a gale. The woods absorbed them once again; whilst the rain of shells upon the British trenches became thicker and more deadly.

There was a lull in the infantry attack, and the British, peering from their shelters, surveyed with a grim satisfaction the patches and smudges of grey which showed the effect of their fire. But the rest was not a long one. With fine courage the German battalions reformed under the shelter of the trees, while fresh troops from the rear pushed forward to stiffen the shaken lines. "Hold your fire!" was the order that ran down the ranks. With the confidence bred of experience, the men waited and still waited, till the very features of the Germans could be distin-

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guished. Then once more the deadly fire rippled down the line, the masses shredded and dissolved, and the fugitives hurried to the woods. Then came the pause under shell fire, and then once again the emergence of the infantry, the attack, the check, and the recoil. Such were the general characteristics of the action at Mons over a large portion of the British line—that portion which extended along the actual course of the canal.

It is not to be supposed, however, that there was a monotony of attack and defence over the whole of the British position. A large part of the force, including the whole of the First Army Corps, was threatened rather than seriously engaged, while the opposite end of the line was also out of the main track of the storm. It beat most dangerously, as had been foreseen, upon the troops to the immediate west and north of Mons, and especially upon those which defended the impossible peninsula formed by the loop of the canal.

The defence of the bridges of Nimy.

There is a road which runs from Mons due north through the village of Nimy to Jurbise. The defences to the west of this road were in the hands of the 9th Brigade. The 4th Royal Fusiliers, with half the Scots Fusiliers, were the particular battalions which held the trenches skirting this part of the peninsula, while half the Northumberland Fusiliers were on the straight canal to the westward. To the east of Nimy are three road bridges—those of Nimy itself, Lock No. 5, and Aubourg Station. All these three bridges were defended by the 4th Middlesex, who had made shallow trenches which commanded them. The Gordons were on their immediate right. The field of fire was much interfered with by the

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mines and buildings which faced them, so that at this point the Germans could get up unobserved to the very front. It has also been already explained that the German artillery could enfilade the peninsula from each side, making the defence most difficult. A rush of German troops came between eleven and twelve o'clock across the Aubourg Station Bridge. It was so screened up to the moment of the advance that neither the rifles nor the machine-guns of the Middlesex could stop it. It is an undoubted fact that this rush was preceded by a great crowd of women and children, through which the leading files of the Germans could hardly be seen. At the same time, or very shortly afterwards, the other two bridges were forced in a similar manner, but the Germans in all three cases as they reached the farther side were unable to make any rapid headway against the British fire, though they made the position untenable for the troops in trenches between the bridges. The whole of the 8th Brigade, supported by the 2nd Irish Rifles from McCracken's 7th Brigade, which had been held in reserve at Cipley, were now fully engaged, covering the retirement of the Middlesex and Gordons. At some points the firing between the two lines of infantry was across the breadth of a road. Two batteries of the 40th Artillery Brigade, which were facing the German attack at this point, were badly mauled, one of them, the 23rd R.F.A., losing its gun teams. Major Ingham succeeded in reconstituting his equipment and getting his guns away.

It is well to accentuate the fact that though this was thè point of the most severe pressure there was never any disorderly retirement, and strong reserves

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were available had they been needed. The 8th Brigade, at the time of the general strategical withdrawal of the Army, made its arrangements in a methodical fashion, and General Doran kept his hold until after nightfall upon Bois la Haut, which was an elevation to the east of Mons from which the German artillery might have harassed the British retreat, since it commanded all the country to the south. The losses of the brigade had, however, been considerable, amounting to not less than three hundred and fifty in the case of the 4th Middlesex, many being killed or wounded in the defence, and some cut off in the trenches between the various bridge-heads. Majors Davey and Abell of the Middlesex were respectively wounded and killed, with thirteen other officers.

It has already been said that the line of the 4th Royal Fusiliers extended along the western perimeter up to Nimy Road Bridge, where Colonel MacMahon's section ended and that of Colonel Hull, of the Middlesex Regiment, began. To the west of this point was the Nimy Railway Bridge, defended also by Captain Ashburner's company of the 4th Royal Fusiliers. This was assaulted early, and was held for nearly five hours against an attack of several German battalions. The British artillery was unable to help much the defence, as the town of Mons in the rear offered no positions for guns, but the 107th Battery in the immediate rear did good work. The defence was continued until the Germans who had already crossed to the east were advancing on the flank. Lieutenant Maurice Dease, five times wounded before he was killed, worked his machine-gun to the end, and every man of his detachment was hit. Lieutenant Dease and Private Godley both

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received the Victoria Cross. The occupants of one trench, including Lieutenant Smith, who was wounded, were cut off by the rush. Captain Carey commanded the covering company and the retirement was conducted in good order, though Captain Bowden Smith, Lieutenant Mead, and a number of men fell in the movement. Altogether, the Royal Fusiliers lost five officers and about two hundred men in the defence of the bridge, Lieutenant Tower having seven survivors in his platoon of sixty. Captain Byng's company at the Glin Bridge farther east had severe losses and was driven in in the same way. As the infantry retired a small party of engineers under Captain Theodore Wright endeavoured to destroy this and other bridges. Lieutenant Day was twice wounded in his attempt upon the main Nimy Bridge. Corporal Jarvis received the V.C. for his exertions in preparing the Jemappes bridge for destruction to the west of Nimy. Captain Wright, with Sergeant Smith, made an heroic endeavour under terrific fire to detonate the charge, but was wounded and fell into the canal. Lieutenant Holt, a brave young officer of reserve engineers, also lost his life in these operations.

The holding of the canal.

Having held on as long as was possible, the front line of the 9th Brigade fell back upon the prepared position on high ground between Mons and Frameries, where the 107th R.F.A. was entrenched. The 4th Royal Fusiliers passed through Mons and reached the new line in good order and without further loss. The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, however, falling back to the same point on a different route (through Flenu), came under heavy machine-gun fire

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from a high soil heap, losing Captain Rose and a hundred men.

The falling back of the 8th and 9th Brigades from the Nimy Peninsula had an immediate effect upon Cuthbert's 13th Brigade, which was on their left holding the line up to the railway bridge just east of St. Ghislain. Of this brigade two battalions, the 1st West Kent on the right and the 2nd Scottish Borderers on the left, were in the trenches while the 2nd West Riding and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry were in support, having their centre at Boussu. The day began by some losses to the West Kent Regiment, who were probably, apart from cavalry patrols, the first troops to suffer in the great war. A company of the regiment under Captain Lister was sent across the canal early as a support to some advancing cavalry, and was driven in about eleven o'clock with a loss of two officers and about a hundred men. From this time onwards the German attacks were easily held, though the German guns were within twelve hundred yards. The situation was changed when it was learned later in the day that the Germans were across to the right and had got as far as Flenu on the flank of the brigade. In view of this advance, General Smith-Dorrien, having no immediate supports, dashed off on a motor to Sir Douglas Haig's headquarters some four miles distant, and got his permission to use Haking's 5th Brigade, which pushed up in time to re-establish the line.

It has been shown that the order of the regiments closely engaged in the front line was, counting from the east, the 1st Gordons, the 4th Middlesex, the 4th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Scots Fusiliers, half the 1st

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Northumberland Fusiliers, the 1st West Kents, and the 2nd Scottish Borderers, the other regiments of these brigades being in reserve. The latter battalion, being opposite a bridge, was heavily engaged all day, losing many men, but holding its position intact against repeated advances. On the left hand or western side of the Scottish Borderers, continuing the line along the canal, one would come upon the front of the 14th Brigade (Rolt's), which was formed by the 1st Surrey on the right and the 1st Duke of Cornwall's on the left. The German attack upon this portion of the line began about 1 P.M., and by 3 P.M. had become so warm that the reserve companies were drawn into the firing line. Thanks to their good work, both with rifles and with machine-guns, the regiments held their own until about six o'clock in the evening, when the retirement of the troops on their right enabled the Germans to enfilade the right section of the East Surreys at close range. They were ordered to retire, but lost touch with the left section, which remained to the north of the canal where their trench was situated. Captain Benson of this section had been killed and Captain Campbell severely wounded, but the party of one hundred and ten men under Lieutenant Morritt held on most gallantly and made a very fine defence. Being finally surrounded, they endeavoured to cut their way out with cold steel, Lieutenant Ward being killed and Morritt four times wounded in the attempt. Many of the men were killed and wounded, and the survivors were taken. Altogether the loss of the regiment was five officers and one hundred and thirty-four men.

On the left of the East Surreys, as already stated,

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lay the 1st Duke of Cornwall's of the same brigade. About four o'clock in the afternoon the presence of the German outflanking corps first made itself felt. At that hour the Cornwalls were aware of an advance upon their left as well as their front. The Cornwalls drew in across the canal in consequence, and the Germans did not follow them over that evening.

The chief point defended by the 14th Brigade upon this day had been the bridge and main road which crosses the canal between Pommeroeul and Thulin, some eight or nine miles west of Mons. In the evening, when the final order for retreat was given, this bridge was blown up, and the brigade fell back after nightfall as far as Dour, where it slept.

The fateful telegram.

By the late afternoon the general position was grave, but not critical. The enemy had lost very heavily, while the men in the trenches were, in comparison, unscathed. Here and there, as we have seen, the Germans had obtained a lodgment in the British position, especially at the salient which had always appeared to be impossible to hold, but, on the other hand, the greater part of the Army, including the whole First Corps, had not yet been seriously engaged, and there were reserve troops in the immediate rear of the fighting line who could be trusted to make good any gap in the ranks before them. The German artillery fire was heavy and well-directed, but the British batteries had held their own. Such was the position when, about 5 P.M., a telegram from General Joffre was put into Sir John French's hand, which must have brought a pang to his heart. From it he learned that all his work had been in vain,

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and that far from contending for victory, he would be fortunate if he saved himself from utter defeat.

There were two pieces of information in this fatal message, and each was disastrous. The first announced that instead of the two German corps whom he had reason to think were in front of him, there were four—the Third, Fourth, Seventh, and Fourth Reserve Corps—forming, with the second and fourth cavalry divisions, a force of nearly 200,000 men, while the Second Corps were bringing another 40,000 round his left flank from the direction of Tournai. The second item was even more serious. Instead of being buttressed up with French troops on either side of him, he learned that the Germans had burst the line of the Sambre, and that the French armies on his right were already in full retreat, while nothing substantial lay upon his left. It was a most perilous position. The British force lay exposed and unsupported amid converging foes who far outnumbered it in men and guns. What was the profit of one day of successful defence if the morrow would dawn upon a British Sedan? There was only one course of action, and Sir John decided upon it in the instant, bitter as the decision must have been. The Army must be extricated from the battle and fall back until it resumed touch with its Allies.

But it is no easy matter to disengage so large an army which is actually in action and hard-pressed by a numerous and enterprising enemy. The front was extensive and the lines of retreat were limited. That the operation was carried out in an orderly fashion is a testimony to the skill of the General, the talents of the commanders, and the discipline of the units. If it had been done at once and simultaneously it

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would certainly have been the signal for a vigorous German advance and a possible disaster. The positions were therefore held, though no efforts were made to retake those points where the enemy had effected a lodgment. There was no possible use in wasting troops in regaining positions which would in no case be held. As dusk fell, a dusk which was lightened by the glare of burning villages, some of the regiments began slowly to draw off to the rear. In the early morning of the 24th the definite order to retire was conveyed to the corps commanders, whilst immediate measures were taken to withdraw the impedimenta and to clear the roads.

Such, in its bare outlines, was the action of Mons upon August 23, interesting for its own sake, but more so as being the first clash between the British and German armies. One or two questions call for discussion before the narrative passes on. The most obvious of these is the question of the bridges. Why were they not blown up in the dangerous peninsula? Without having any special information upon the point, one might put forward the speculation that the reason why they were not at once blown up was that the whole of Joffre's advance was an aggressive movement for the relief of Namur, and that the bridges were not destroyed because they would be used in a subsequent advance. It will always be a subject for speculation as to what would have occurred had the battle been fought to a finish. Considering the comparative merits of British and German infantry as shown in many a subsequent encounter, and allowing for the advantage that the defence has over the attack, it is probable that the odds might not have been too great and that Sir

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John French might have remained master of the field. That, however, is a matter of opinion. What is not a matter of opinion is that the other German armies to the east would have advanced on the heels of the retiring French, that they would have cut the British off from their Allies, and that they would have been hard put to it to reach the coast. Therefore, win or lose, the Army had no possible course open but to retire. The actual losses of the British were not more than three or four thousand, the greater part from the 8th, 9th, and 13th Brigades. There are no means as yet by which the German losses can be taken out from the general returns, but when one considers the repeated advances over the open and the constant breaking of the dense attacking formations, it is impossible that they should have been fewer than from seven to ten thousand men. Each army had for the first time an opportunity of forming a critical estimate of the other. German officers have admitted with soldierly frankness that the efficiency of the British came to them as a revelation, which is not surprising after the assurances that had been made to them. On the other hand, the British bore away a very clear conviction of the excellence of the German artillery and of the plodding bravery of the German infantry, together with a great reassurance as to their own capacity to hold their own at any reasonable odds.

The rear-guard actions of Frameries, Wasmes, and Dour.

After a night of flames and of uproar the day dawned, a day of great anxiety to the British commanders and of considerable pressure upon a portion of the troops. Sir John French had given instructions that the First Corps, which had been only slightly engaged the day before, should pretend to

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assume the offensive upon the extreme right wing in the direction of Binche, whilst the Second Corps began its retirement. The enemy was following up rapidly, however, along the whole length of the British line, both flanks of which were exposed. Shortly after dawn the evacuated positions had been occupied, and Mons itself was in the hands of the advancing Germans. The Second Corps began its retreat, helped by the feint which was carried out by General Haig upon the right, and by the bulk of the batteries of both corps, but the pursuit was vigorous and the shell-fire incessant. A shell from the rear is more intimidating than twenty in the front. Hamilton's Third Division, including the 8th and 9th Brigades, who had done such hard work the day before, sustained the most severe losses, especially at Frameries, four miles south of Mons. The 2nd Royal Scots of the 8th Brigade about midnight had been attacked by a heavy German column which got so near that the swish of their feet through the long grass put the regiment on the alert. The attack was blown back by a volley at close quarters. The 9th Brigade (Shaw's), which covered the retreat, was closely pressed from dawn by the pursuing Germans, and was subjected to a very heavy shell-fire. A barricade, erected in the village and manned by Captain Sandilands, of the Northumberlands, with his company, held up the German advance, and they were never permitted to reach the line nor to hustle the retirement. Butler's 23rd Artillery Brigade helped with its fire. The chief losses in this skilful covering action fell upon the 1st Lincolns and upon the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, both of which lost about 150 men, including Captain Rose, Lieutenants Bulbe,

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Welchman, and others. There was a stational ambulance in the village of Frameries, and a foreign nurse in its employ has left a vivid picture of the wounded British rushing in grimy and breathless to have their slighter wounds dressed and then running out, rifle in hand, to find their place in the firing line.

The remaining brigade of the Third Division, McCracken's 7th Brigade, had detached one regiment, the 2nd Irish Rifles, upon the day before to reinforce the 8th Brigade, and this regiment had, as already mentioned, some severe fighting, holding back the German advance after the retirement from the Nimy Peninsula of the Middlesex and the Gordons. It did not find its way back to its brigade until the evening of the 24th. The brigade itself, during the first day of the retreat, held a position near Ciply, to the south of Mons, where it was heavily attacked in the early morning, and in some danger as its flank was exposed. At ten o'clock it was ordered to retire *via* Genly towards Bavai, and it carried out this difficult movement in the face of a pushful enemy in perfect order, covered by the divisional artillery. The principal losses fell upon the 2nd South Lancashire Regiment, which came under heavy fire from German machine-guns posted upon slag-heaps. This regiment was very hard hit, losing several hundred men. The brigade faced round near Bavai and held off the pursuit.

Cuthbert's 13th Brigade, keeping in line with their comrades on the right, halted at Wasmes, some four miles from the canal, where they prepared some hasty entrenchments. Here, at the dawn of day, they were furiously attacked by the German vanguard at the same time that the 9th Brigade was hustled

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in Frameries, but for two hours the assailants were beaten back with heavy losses. The brunt of the fighting fell upon the 2nd West Riding Regiment, who lost heavily, were at one time nearly surrounded, and finally, with dour Yorkshire pertinacity, shook themselves clear. Their losses included their commander, Colonel Gibbs, their adjutant, 300 men, and all their officers save five. The 1st West Kents also lost about 100 men and several officers, including Major Pack-Beresford. For the remainder of the day and for the whole of the 25th the brigade, with the rest of the Fifth Division, fell back with little fighting *via* Bavai to the Le Cateau line.

On the evening of the 23rd the 14th Brigade, still farther to the west, had fallen back to Dour, blowing up the bridge and road over the canal. After dark the Germans followed them, and Gleichen's 15th Brigade, which had not yet been engaged, found itself in the position of rearguard and immediately exposed to the pressure of the German flanking movement. This was now threatening to envelop the whole of Ferguson's Fifth Division. The situation was particularly difficult, since this general had to make a flank movement in the face of the enemy in order to close up with his comrades of the Third Division. He was soon compelled to call for assistance, and Allenby, with his cavalry division, was advanced to help him. It was evidently the intention of the enemy to strike in upon the western side of the division and pin it to its ground until it could be surrounded.

The first menacing advance in the morning of the 24th was directed against the flank of the British infantry who were streaming down the Eloges-Dour

The charge of the Lancers.

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high road. The situation was critical, and a portion of De Lisle's 2nd Cavalry Brigade was ordered to charge near Andregnies, the hostile infantry being at that time about a thousand yards distant, with several batteries in support. The attack of the cavalry was vigorously supported by L Battery of Horse Artillery. The charge was carried out by three squadrons of the 9th Lancers, Colonel Campbell at their head. The 4th Dragoon Guards under Colonel Mullens was in support. The cavalry rode forward amidst a heavy but not particularly deadly fire until they were within a few hundred yards of the enemy, when, being faced by a wire fence, they swung to the right and rallied under the cover of some slag-heaps and of a railway embankment. Their menace and rifle fire, or the fine work of Major Sclater-Booth's battery, had the effect of holding up the German advance for some time, and though the cavalry were much scattered and disorganised they were able to reunite without any excessive loss, the total casualties being a little over two hundred. Some hours later the enemy's pressure again became heavy upon Ferguson's flank, and the 1st Cheshires and 1st Norfolks, of Gleichen's 15th Brigade, which formed the infantry flank-guard, incurred heavy losses. It was in this defensive action that the 119th R.F.A., under Major Alexander, fought itself to a standstill with only three unwounded gunners by the guns. The battery had silenced one German unit and was engaged with three others. Only Major Alexander and Lieutenant Pollard with a few men were left. As the horses had been destroyed the pieces had to be man-handled out of action. Captain the Hon. F. Grenfell, of the 9th Lancers, bleeding

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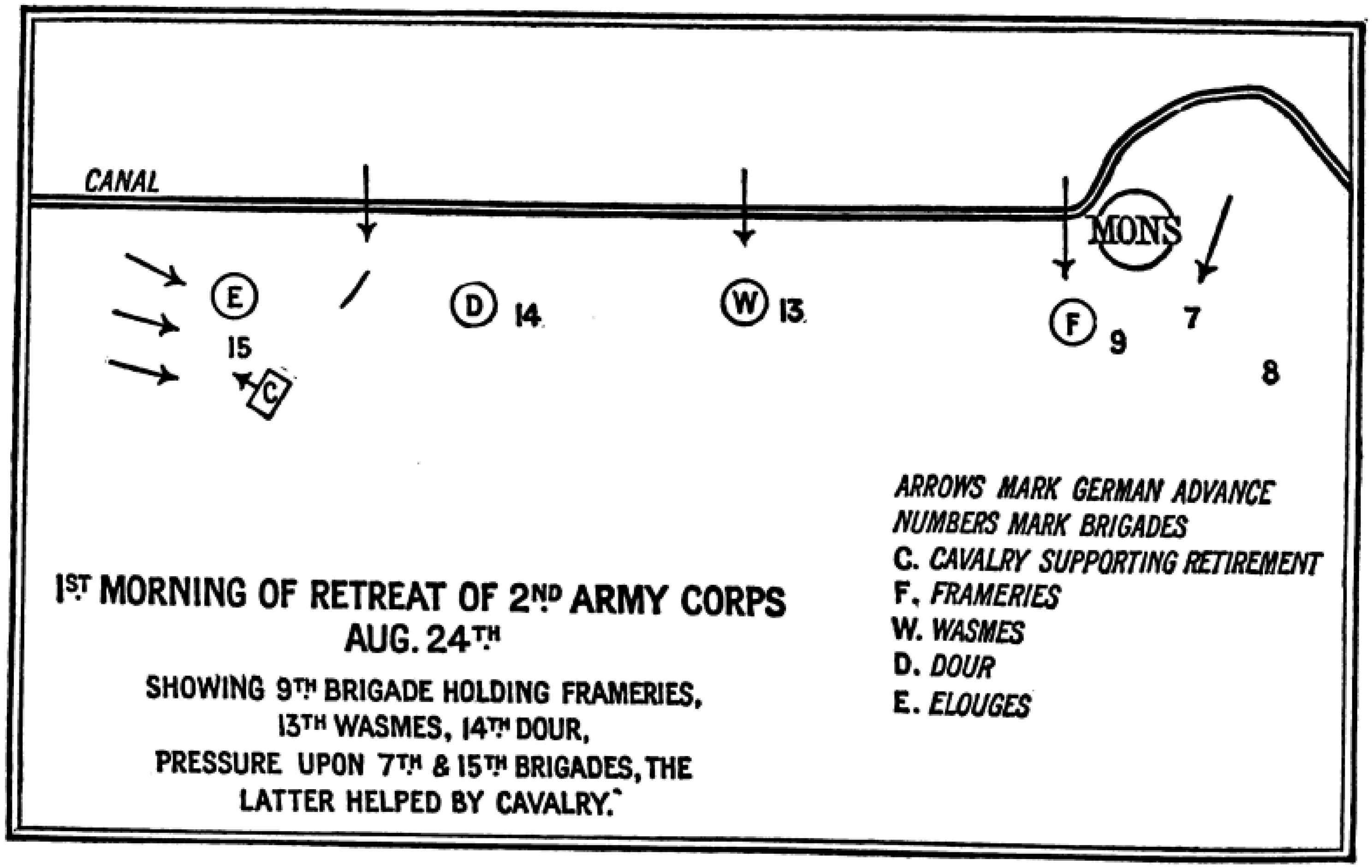

1ST MORNING OF RETREAT OF 2ND ARMY CORPS
AUG. 24TH

SHOWING 9TH BRIGADE HOLDING FRAMERIES,
13TH WASMES, 14TH DOUR,
PRESSURE UPON 7TH & 15TH BRIGADES, THE
LATTER HELPED BY CAVALRY.

ARROWS MARK GERMAN ADVANCE
NUMBERS MARK BRIGADES
C. *CAVALRY SUPPORTING RETIREMENT*
F. *FRAMERIES*
W. *WASMES*
D. *DOUR*
E. *ELOUGES*

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from two wounds, with several officers, Sergeants Davids and Turner, and some fifty men of the regiment, saved these guns under a terrible fire, the German infantry being within close range. During the whole long, weary day the batteries and horsemen were working hard to cover the retreat, while the surgeons exposed themselves with great fearlessness, lingering behind the retiring lines in order to give first aid to the men who had been hit by the incessant shell-fire. It was in this noble task—the noblest surely within the whole range of warfare—that Captain Malcolm Leckie and other brave medical officers met with a glorious end, upholding to the full the traditions of their famous corps.

The fate of the Cheshires.

It has been stated that the 1st Cheshires, in endeavouring to screen the west flank of the Second Corps from the German pursuit, were very badly punished. This regiment, together with two companies of the Norfolks, occupied a low ridge to the north-east side of the village of Eloges, which they endeavoured to hold against the onflowing tide of Germans. About three in the afternoon it was seen that there was danger of this small flank-guard being entirely cut off. As a matter of fact, an order had actually been sent for a retreat, but had not reached them. Colonel Boger of the Cheshires sent several messengers, representing the growing danger, but no answer came back. Finally, in desperation, Colonel Boger went himself and found that the enemy held the position previously occupied by the rest of Gleichen's Brigade, which had retired. The Cheshires had by this time endured dreadful losses, and were practically surrounded. A bayonet charge eased the pressure for a short time, but the enemy

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again closed in and the bulk of the survivors, isolated amidst a hostile army corps, were compelled to surrender. Some escaped in small groups and made their way through to their retreating comrades. When roll was next called, there remained 5 officers and 193 men out of 27 officers and 1007 of all ranks who had gone into action. It speaks volumes for the discipline of the regiment that this remnant, under Captain Shore, continued to act as a useful unit. These various episodes, including the severe losses of Gleichen's 15th Brigade, the attack of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and the artillery action in which the 119th Battery was so severely handled, group themselves into a separate little action occurring the day after Mons and associated either with the villages of Eloges or of Dour. The Second German Corps continued to act upon the western side of the Second British Corps, whilst the rest of General von Kluck's army followed it behind. With three corps close behind him, and one snapping at his flank, General Smith-Dorrien made his way southwards, his gunners and cavalry labouring hard to relieve the ever-increasing pressure, while his rear brigades were continually sprayed by the German shrapnel.

It is to be noted that Sir John French includes the Ninth German Corps in Von Kluck's army in his first dispatch, and puts it in Von Bulow's second army in his second dispatch. The French authorities are of opinion that Von Kluck's army consisted of the second, Third, Fourth, Seventh and the Fourth Reserve Corps, with two divisions of cavalry. If this be correct, then part of Von Bulow's army was pursuing Haig, while the *whole* of Von Kluck's was

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concentrated upon Smith-Dorrien. This would make the British performance even more remarkable than it has hitherto appeared, since it would mean that during the pursuit, and at the subsequent battle, ten German divisions were pressing upon three British ones.

It is not to be supposed that so huge a force was all moving abreast, or available simultaneously at any one point. None the less a General can use his advance corps very much more freely when he knows that every gap can be speedily filled.

A tiny reinforcement had joined the Army on the morning after the battle of Mons. This was the 19th Brigade under General Drummond, which consisted of the 1st Middlesex, 1st Cameronians, 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, and 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. This detached brigade acted, and continued to act during a large part of the war, as an independent unit. It detrained at Valenciennes on August 23, and two regiments, the Middlesex and the Cameronians, may be said to have taken part in the battle of Mons, since they formed up at the east of Condé, on the extreme left of the British position, and received, together with the Queen's Bays, who were scouting in front of them, the first impact of the German flanking corps. They fell back with the Army upon the 24th and 25th, keeping the line Jerlain-Solesmes, finally reaching Le Cateau, where they eventually took up their position on the right rear of the British Army.

As the Army fell back, the border fortress of Maubeuge with its heavy guns offered a tempting haven of rest for the weary and overmatched troops, but not in vain had France lost her army in Metz.

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Sir John French would have no such protection, however violently the Germans might push him towards it. "The British Army invested in Maubeuge" was not destined to furnish the head-line of a Berlin special edition. The fortress was left to the eastward, and the tired troops snatched a few hours of rest near Bavaye, still pursued by the guns and the searchlights of their persistent foemen. At an early hour of the 25th the columns were again on the march for the south, and for safety.

It may be remarked that in all this movement what made the operation most difficult and complicated was, that in the retirement the Army was not moving direct to the rear, but diagonally away to the west, thus making the west flank more difficult to cover as well as complicating the movements of transport. It was this oblique movement which caused the Third Division to change places with the Fifth, so that from now onwards it was to the west of the Army.

The greater part of the Fourth Division of the Third Army Corps, coming up from the lines of communication, brought upon this day a welcome reinforcement to the Army and did yoeman work in covering the retirement. The total composition of this division was as follows:—

THIRD ARMY CORPS

GENERAL PULTNEY.

DIVISION IV.—General SNOW.

10th Infantry Brigade—General Haldane.
1st Warwicks.
2nd Seaforths.
1st Irish Fusiliers.
2nd Dublin Fusiliers.

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11th *Infantry Brigade—General Hunter Weston.*
1st Somerset L. Infantry.
1st East Lancashires.
1st Hants.
1st Rifle Brigade.

12th *Infantry Brigade—General Wilson.*
1st Royal Lancaster Regiment.
2nd Lancs. Fusiliers.
2nd Innis. Fusiliers.
2nd Essex.

Artillery—General Milne.

XIV.	Brig.	R.F.A.	39, 68, 88.
XXIX.	"	"	125, 126,127.
XXXII.	"	"	27, 134, 135.
XXXVII.	"	(How.)	31, 35, 55.

Heavy R.G.A. 31 Battery.
R.E. 7, 9 Field Cos.

These troops, which had been quartered in the Ligny and Montigny area, received urgent orders at one in the morning of the 25th that they should advance northwards. They marched that night to Briaste, where they covered the retreat of the Army, the Third Division passing through their lines. The Fourth Division then retired south again, having great difficulty in getting along, as the roads were choked with transport and artillery, and fringed with exhausted men. The 12th Brigade (Wilson's) was acting as rearguard, and began to experience pressure from the pursuers, the Essex men being shelled out of the village of Bethencourt, which they held until it was nearly surrounded by the German cavalry. The line followed by the division was Briaste—Viesly—Bethencourt—Caudry—Ligny and Haucourt, the latter village marking the general position which they were to take up on the left of the Army at the line of Le Cateau. Such reinforcements were mere handfuls when compared with the pursuing hosts, but their advent heartened up the

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British troops and relieved them of some of the pressure. It has been remarked by officers of the Fourth Division that they and their men were considerably taken aback by the worn appearance of the weary regiments from Mons which passed through their ranks. Their confidence was revived, however, by the undisturbed demeanour of the General Headquarters Staff, who came through them in the late afternoon of the 25th. "General French himself struck me as being extremely composed, and the staff officers looked very cheerful." These are the imponderabilia which count for much in a campaign.

Tuesday, August 25, was a day of scattered rearguard actions. The weary Army had rested upon the evening of the 24th upon the general line Maubeuge—Bavai—Wargnies. Orders were issued for the retirement to continue next day to a position already partly prepared, in front of the centre of which stood the town of Le Cateau. All rearguards were to be clear of the above-mentioned line by 5:30 A. M. The general conception was that the inner flanks of the two corps should be directed upon Le Cateau.

The intention of the Commander-in-Chief was that the Army should fight in that position next day, the First Corps occupying the right and the Second Corps the left of the position. The night of the 25th found the Second Corps in the position named, whilst their comrades were still at Landrecies, eight miles to the north-east, with a cavalry brigade endeavouring to bridge the gap between. It is very certain, in the case of so ardent a leader as Haig, that it was no fault upon his part which kept him from Smith-Dorrien's side upon the day of battle. It can only

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be said that the inevitable delays upon the road experienced by the First Corps, including the rear-guard actions which it fought, prevented the ensuing battle from being one in which the British Army as a whole might have stemmed the rush of Von Kluck's invading host.

The Seventh Brigade at Solesmes.

Whilst the whole Army had been falling back upon the position which had been selected for a stand, it was hoped that substantial French reinforcements were coming up from the south. The roads were much blocked during the 25th, for two divisions of French territorials were retiring along them, as well as the British Army. As a consequence, progress was slow, and the German pressure from the rear became ever more severe. Allenby's cavalry and horse-guns covered the retreat, continually turning round and holding off the pursuers. Finally, near Solesmes, on the evening of the 25th, the cavalry were at last driven in, and the Germans came up against McCracken's 7th Brigade, who held them most skilfully until nightfall with the assistance of the 42nd Brigade R.F.A. and the 30th Howitzer Brigade. Most of the fighting fell upon the 1st Wiltshires and 2nd South Lancashires, both of which had substantial losses. The Germans could make no further progress, and time was given for the roads to clear and for the artillery to get away. The 7th Brigade then followed, marching, so far as possible, across country and taking up its position, which it did not reach until after midnight, in the village of Caudry, on the line of the Le Cateau-Courtrai road. As it faced north once more it found Snow's Fourth Division upon its left, while on its immediate right were the 8th and the 9th Brigades, with the Fifth

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Division on the farther side of them. One unit of the 7th Brigade, the 2nd Irish Rifles, together with the 41st R.F.A., was lost in the darkness and confusion and wandered away with the cavalry. The rest were in the battle line. Here we may leave them in position while we return to trace the fortunes of the First Army Corps.

Sir Douglas Haig's corps, after the feint of August 24, in which the Second Division appeared to be attacking with the First in support, was cleverly disengaged from the enemy and fell back by alternate divisions. It was not an easy operation, and it was conducted under a very heavy shell-fire, which fell especially upon the covering guns of Colonel Sandilands' 34th Artillery Brigade. These guns were exposed to a concentration of fire from the enemy, which was so intense that a thick haze of smoke and dust blotted out the view for long periods at a time. It was only with difficulty and great gallantry that they were got away. An officer of the 6th Brigade, immediately behind them, writes: "Both going in and coming back the limbers passed my trench at a tearing gallop, the drivers lying low on the horses' necks and screaming at them to go faster, while on the return the guns bounded about on the stubble field like so many tin cans behind a runaway dog." The guns having been drawn in, the corps retired by roads parallel to the Second Corps, and were able to reach the line Bavai-Maubeuge by about 7 P.M. upon that evening, being on the immediate eastern flank of Smith-Dorrien's men. It is a striking example of the historical continuity of the British Army that as they marched that day many of the regiments, such as the Guards and the 1st King's

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Liverpool, passed over the graves of their predecessors who had died under the same colours at Malplaquet in 1709, two hundred and six years before.

On August 25 General Haig continued his retreat. During the day he fell back to the west of Maubeuge by Feignies to Vavesnes and Landrecies. The considerable forest of Mormal intervened between the

The Guards in action.

two sections of the British Army. On the forenoon of this day the vanguard of the German infantry, using motor transport, overtook Davies' 6th Brigade, which was acting as rearguard to the corps. They pushed in to within five hundred yards, but were driven back by rifle-fire. Other German forces were coming rapidly up and enveloping the wings of the British rearguard, but the brigade, through swift and skilful handling, disengaged itself from what was rapidly becoming a dangerous situation. The weather was exceedingly hot during the day, and with their heavy packs the men were much exhausted, many of them being barely able to stagger. In the evening, footsore and weary, they reached the line of Landrecies, Maroilles and Pont-sur-Sambre. The 4th Brigade of Guards, consisting of Grenadiers, Coldstream, and Irish, under General Scott-Kerr, occupied the town of Landrecies. During the day they had seen little of the enemy, and they had no reason to believe that the forest, which extended up to the outskirts of the town, was full of German infantry pressing eagerly to cut them off. The possession of vast numbers of motor lorries for infantry transport introduces a new element into strategy, especially the strategy of a pursuit, which was one of those disagreeable first experiences of up-to-date warfare which the British Army had to

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undergo. It ensures that the weary retreating rear-guard shall ever have a perfectly fresh pursuing van-guard at its heels.

The Guards at Landrecies were put into the empty cavalry barracks for a much-needed rest, but they had hardly settled down before there was an alarm that the Germans were coming into the town. It was just after dusk that a column of infantry debouched from the shadow of the trees and advanced briskly towards the town. A company of the 3rd Coldstream under Captain Monck gave the alarm, and the whole regiment stood to arms, while the rest of the brigade, who could not operate in so confined a space, defended the other entrances of the town. The van of the approaching Germans shouted out that they were French, and seemed to have actually got near enough to attack the officer of the picket and seize a machine-gun before the Guardsmen began to fire. There is a single approach to the village, and no means of turning it, so that the attack was forced to come directly down the road.

The Germans' rude awakening.

Possibly the Germans had the impression that they were dealing with demoralised fugitives, but if so they got a rude awakening. The advance party, who were endeavouring to drag away the machine-gun, were all shot down, and their comrades who stormed up to the houses were met with a steady and murderous fire which drove them back into the shadows of the wood. A gun was brought up by them, and fired at a range of five hundred yards with shrapnel, but the Coldstream, reinforced by a second company, lay low or flattened themselves into the doorways for protection, while the 9th British Battery replied from a position behind the town. Pres-

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ently, believing that the way had been cleared for them, there was a fresh surge of dark masses out of the wood, and they poured into the throat of the street. The Guards had brought out two machine-guns, and their fire, together with a succession of volleys from the rifles, decimated the stormers. Some of them got near enough to throw hand bombs among the British, but none effected a lodgment among the buildings.

From time to time there were fresh advances during the night, designed apparently rather to tire out the troops than to gain the village. Once fire was set to the house at the end of the street, but the flames were extinguished by a party led by Corporal Wyatt, of the 3rd Coldstream. The Irish Guards after midnight relieved the Coldstream of their vigil, and in the early morning the tired but victorious brigade went forward unmolested upon their way. They had lost 170 of their number, nearly all from the two Coldstream companies. Lord Hawarden and the Hon. Windsor Clive of the Coldstream and Lieut. Vereker of the Grenadiers were killed; four other officers were wounded. The Germans in their close attacking formation had suffered very much more heavily. Their enterprise was a daring one, for they had pushed far forward to get command of the Landrecies Bridge, but their audacity became foolhardy when faced by steady, unshaken infantry. History has shown many times before that a retreating British Army still retains a sting in its tail.

At the same time as the Guards' Brigade was attacked at Landrecies there was an advance from the forest against Maroilles, which is four miles to

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the eastward. A troop of the 15th Hussars guarding a bridge over the Sambre near that point was driven in by the enemy, and two attempts on the part of the 1st Berkshires, of Davies' 6th Brigade, to retake it were repulsed, owing to the fact that the only approach was by a narrow causeway with marshland on either side, where it was not possible for infantry to deploy. The 1st Rifles were ordered to support the Berkshires, but darkness had fallen and nothing could be done. The casualties in this skirmish amounted to 124 killed, wounded, or missing. The Landrecies and Maroilles wounded were left behind with some of the medical staff. At this period of the war the British had not yet understood the qualities of the enemy, and several times made the mistake of trusting surgeons and orderlies to their mercy, with the result that they were inhumanly treated, both by the authorities at the front and by the populace in Germany, whither they were conveyed as starving prisoners of war. Five of them, Captains Edmunds and Hamilton, Lieut. Danks (all of the Army Medical Corps), with Dr. Austin and Dr. Elliott, who were exchanged in January 1915, deposed that they were left absolutely without food for long periods. It is only fair to state that at a later date, with a few scandalous exceptions, such as that of Wittenberg, the German treatment of prisoners, though often harsh, was no longer barbarous. For the first six months, however, it was brutal in the extreme, and frequently accompanied by torture as well as neglect. A Spanish prisoner, incarcerated by mistake, has given very clear neutral evidence of the abominable punishments of the prison camps.

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His account reads more like the doings of Iroquois than of a Christian nation.

A small mishap—small on the scale of such a war, though serious enough in itself—befell a unit of the First Army Corps on the morning after the Landrecies engagement. The portion of the German army who pursued General Haig had up to now been able to effect little, and that little at considerable cost to themselves. Early on August 26, however, a brisk action was fought near Pont-sur-Sambre, in which the 2nd Connaughts, of Haking's Fifth Brigade, lost six officers, including Colonel Abercrombie, who was taken prisoner, and 280 men. The regiment was cut off by a rapidly advancing enemy in a country which was so thickly enclosed that there was great difficulty in keeping touch between the various companies or in conveying their danger to the rest of the brigade. By steadiness and judgment the battalion was extricated from a most difficult position, but it was at the heavy cost already quoted. In this case again the use by the enemy of great numbers of motor lorries in their pursuit accounts for the suddenness and severity of the attacks which now and afterwards fell upon the British rearguards.

The Connaughts at Pont-sur-Sambre.

Dawn broke upon August 26, a day upon which the exhausted troops were destined to be tried to the limit of human endurance. It was the date of Von Kluck's exultant telegram in which he declared that he held them surrounded, a telegram which set Berlin fluttering with flags. On this day the First Army Corps was unmolested in its march, reaching the Venerolles line that night. There was woody country upon the west of it, and from beyond this curtain of trees they heard the distant roar of a terrific can-

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nonade, and knew that a great battle was in progress to the westward. It was on Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps and upon the single division of the Third Corps that the full storm of the German attack had broken. In a word, a corps and a half of British troops, with 225 guns, were assailed by certainly four and probably five German corps, with 600 guns. It is no wonder that the premature tidings of a great German triumph were forwarded that morning to make one more item in that flood of good news which from August 21 to the end of the month was pouring in upon the German people. A glittering mirage lay before them. The French lines had been hurled back from the frontier, the British were in full retreat, and now were faced with absolute disaster. Behind these breaking lines lay the precious capital, the brain and heart of France. But God is not always with the big battalions, and the end was not yet.

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CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU

The order of battle at Le Cateau—The stand of the 2nd Suffolks—Major Yate's V.C.—The fight for the quarries—The splendid work of the British guns—Difficult retirement of the Fourth Division—The fate of the 1st Gordons—Results of the battle—Exhaustion of the Army—The destruction of the 2nd Munsters—A cavalry fight—The news in Great Britain—The views of General Joffre—Battery L—The action of Villars-Cotteret—Reunion of the Army.

CHAPTER III.

The Battle of Le Cateau.

REFERENCE has already been made to the retirement of Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps, covered by Allenby's cavalry, throughout the 25th. The heads of the columns arrived at the Le Cateau position at about 3 P.M., but the rearguards were fighting far into the night, and came in eventually in an exhausted condition. The Fourth Division, which was still quite fresh, did good and indeed vital service by allowing the tired units to pass through its ranks and acting as a pivot upon which the cavalry could fall back.

Sir John French had reconsidered the idea of making a stand at Le Cateau, feeling, no doubt, that if his whole Army could not be consolidated there the affair would be too desperate. He had moved with his staff during the evening of the 25th to St. Quentin, leaving word that the retirement should be continued early next morning. Smith-Dorrien spent the afternoon and evening going round the position, but it was not until 2 A.M. upon the morning of the 26th that he was able to ascertain the whereabouts of all

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his scattered and weary units. About that time General Allenby reported that his cavalry had been widely separated, two and a half brigades being at Chatillon, six miles east of Le Cateau, the other one and a half brigades being near Ligny, four miles west of the same town. General Smith-Dorrien was in the position that his troops were scattered, weary, and in danger of losing their *morale* through continued retreat in the presence of an ever-pressing enemy. Even with the best soldiers such an experience too long continued may turn an army into a rabble. He therefore made urgent representations by telephone to the Commander-in-Chief, pointing out that the only hope of checking the dangerous German pursuit was to stagger them by a severe counter. "The only thing for the men to do when they can't stand is to lie down and fight," said he. Sir John assented to the view, with the proviso that the retirement should be continued as soon as possible. Smith-Dorrien, taking under his orders the cavalry, the Fourth Division, and the 19th Brigade, as well as his own corps, issued instructions for the battle which he knew must begin within a few hours.

Owing to the gap of eight miles between the nearest points of the two corps, both flanks of the position were in the air. Smith-Dorrien therefore requested the cavalry brigades from Chatillon to move in and guard the east flank, while the rest of the cavalry watched the west. He was less anxious about the latter, as he knew that Sordet's French cavalry was in that direction.

The exhausted infantry, who had now been marching for about a week, and fighting for three days and the greater part of three nights, flung themselves

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down where best they could, some to the north-east of Le Cateau, some in the town, and some along the line of very inadequate trenches, hastily prepared by civilian labour. In the early dawn they took up their position, the Fifth Division being to the right near the town. Of this division, the 14th Brigade (Rolt's) was on the extreme right, the 13th (Cuthbert's) to the left of it, and the 15th (Gleichen's) in reserve. To the west of the Fifth Division lay the Third, their trenches covering the villages of Troisville (9th Brigade), Audencourt (8th Brigade), and Caudry (7th Brigade). Behind Caudry one and a half brigades of cavalry were in reserve to strengthen the left wing. From Caudry the line was thrown back to meet a flanking movement and extended to Haucourt. This portion was held by Snow's Fourth Division. Sordet's cavalry had passed across the rear of the British position the day before, and lay now to the left flank and rear of the Army. There were rumours of approaching French forces from the south, which put heart into the weary men, but, as a matter of fact, they had only their own brave spirits upon which to depend. Their numbers, putting every unit at its full complement, were about 70,000 men. Their opponents were four army corps at the least, with two divisions of cavalry —say, 170,000 men with an overpowering artillery. Subsequent reports showed that the guns of all five army corps had been concentrated for the battle.

It has been said that Rolt's 14th Brigade was at the extreme right of the line. This statement needs some expansion. The 14th Brigade consisted of the 1st East Surrey, 2nd Suffolk, 2nd Manchester, and 1st Cornwalls. Of these four regiments, half of the

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