DAYS TO REMEMBER

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The British Empire in the Great War

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THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE GREAT WAR

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PART I.

INTRODUCTORY.

DAYS TO REMEMBER.

CHAPTER I.
THE CAUSES OF THE WAR.

It is never easy to fix upon one cause as the origin of a great war, and the war of 1914 was the outcome of several causes combined. For twenty years there had been growing up in Europe a sense of insecurity; the great Powers had become restless and suspicious of one another, and one Power, Germany, was seriously considering the possibility of some bold stroke which would put her beyond the reach of rivalry. Germany, since her victory over France in 1870, had become a very great and rich nation; she had spread her commerce over the world; and

she was anxious to create an empire akin to those of Britain and France. But she began the task too late in the day; she could succeed only at the expense of her neighbours. The ambition of Germany was, therefore, one perpetual source of danger.

Another danger was her nervousness, which frequently accompanies ambition. There was an alliance between France and Russia, and a growing friendliness between Britain and France, and Germany feared that her rivals were combining to hem her in and put a stop to what she considered her natural development. Russia had fallen very low after the war with Japan, but was rapidly recovering both in wealth and armed strength. France was making strenuous efforts to increase her army, so that she should not be at a disadvantage as compared with the far greater population of Germany. Britain had no ambitions of conquest; her aim was the peaceful development of her Empire. But that was an oversea Empire, and she required a large navy; and the size of this navy seemed to Germany to be a menace to her future.

The result was that in the summer of 1914 the rulers of Germany had decided that some great effort must soon be made; they must put their land in such a position that for the future it would have no cause to dread the aggression, or even the rivalry, of other Powers. If they delayed too long they feared that the growing wealth of Russia and the increased military strength of France would make such an effort for ever impossible.

On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, was murdered, along with his wife, in the little Bosnian town of Serajevo. Austria had long been jealous of the movement towards unity among the Slav peoples in the Balkans, with Serbia at their head, and she believed, or pretended to believe, that the murder had been connived at by the Serbian Government. Germany, for reasons of her own, was equally desirous to see the power of the Balkan states diminished. She had a grandiose design of extending her influence eastward through Constantinople to the Persian Gulf, with Turkey as her ally or her tool, and planting a German outpost on the flank of our Indian Empire; and a strong Serbian kingdom, or a union of Slav peoples, would effectually bar the way. With the approval of Germany, therefore, Austria sent an ultimatum to Serbia, demanding certain concessions which would have made Serbia no longer a sovereign state. Serbia, while willing to grant most of the demands, was compelled to refuse others, and Austria promptly declared war.

Russia now interfered in support of Serbia, and mobilized her armies on her southern frontiers. Every attempt was made by the statesmen of Western Europe, and notably by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, to limit the quarrel and to persuade Austria to listen to reason. Germany, however, had no desire for a peaceful settlement. She induced Austria to refuse all mediation,

and presently, after a peremptory request to the Tsar to demobilize, she declared war upon Russia. Russia and France were allies, and war with France followed naturally within twenty-four hours.

The position of Britain had become extremely difficult She had no formal alliance with France, but in her own interests she could not allow her nearest neighbour to be crushed, and the balance of power in Europe to be entirely changed. Britain had never seriously considered the possibility of a European war, and was extremely averse from interfering in a quarrel in which she had no direct concern. She might well have hesitated till it was too late to act with effect, or have blundered into some foolish compromise with Germany.

The situation was saved by Belgium. The German scheme of attack on France was based upon a sudden invasion from the north, and for this a march through Belgium was essential. The neutrality of Belgium had long before been guaranteed by all the great Powers, but Germany argued that her necessity must override the law of nations, and demanded a passage through Belgium. This was refused. The invasion of Belgium accordingly began on Sunday, the 2nd August, and this outrage determined the policy of the British Government and the British people.

On Monday, the 3rd August, Sir Edward Grey announced that the fleet and the army had been mobilized, and that Britain proposed to defend with the sword her treaty obligations to Belgium. That evening an ultimatum was sent to Germany demanding her immediate withdrawal from Belgium; next day we were at war with Germany. On the same afternoon the German Imperial Chancellor made a speech defending his violation of Belgian neutrality. "He who is threatened, as we are threatened, can have but the one thought—how he is to hack his way through." The German Government had believed to the last that Britain would remain neutral, and her entry into the conflict for a moment dashed their zeal for war. "The British change the whole situation," the Emperor told the United States Ambassador. "An obstinate nation! They will keep up the war. It cannot end soon."

Britain had no great military force to throw into the balance, such as the armies of France and Russia. Her small regular army was little more than a garrison for her Oversea Dominions, and her Territorial Force was intended for home defence. But Lord Haldane, when Secretary for War, had foreseen the possibility of a Continental struggle, and had prepared plans by which an Expeditionary Force of about 100,000 men could be placed on the Continent of Europe in a very short time. This force was, for its size, probably the most expert army in the world. It took its place on the left of the French line, and, though small in comparison with the mighty levy of France, it was fated to play a leading part in the first decisive battles.

Behind the regular army was our second line of defence, the Territorials, nominally 300,000 strong. But it was very certain that as soon as war was declared the whole manhood of Britain would be called upon, and that many hundreds of thousands of young men would be eager to serve. Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary for War, and under his direction recruiting began. Before Christmas nearly two millions of our men were under arms.

But Britain's main weapon was her navy, which was by far the strongest in the world. After that came her wealth and her great manufacturing capacity, by which she could supply the munitions of war required both for her own forces and for those of her allies. If her navy could dominate the seas, then her commerce would go on as before, while that of Germany would cease, and her troops and those of her allies could be moved about the world at her pleasure. "He who commands the sea," as Francis Bacon said long ago, "hath great freedom."

Germany was prepared for a war which she had always foreseen, and had the greater strength; but if the Allies did not suffer an early defeat, their strength was certain to grow with every month, while that of Germany must decline. But if the Allies were thus to grow in power they must be able to maintain free communications with the outer world and with one another, and for this they must rely on the supremacy of the British fleet.

In the very first days of war events happened which proved that the German Emperor was right in dreading the entry of Britain into the struggle. The British Empire overseas awoke to action like a strong man from slumber, and there began an epic of service which was to grow in power and majesty up to the last hour of the campaign. No man can read without emotion the tale of those early days in August, when from every quarter of the globe there poured in appeals for the right to share in Britain's struggle.

The great free nations of the Empire—Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand—prepared to raise and send troops, and the smallest Crown colonies made their contributions in money or supplies. India, whom Germany believed to be disloyal, at once agreed to send two infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade, and all the native rulers and princes placed their resources at the King-Emperor's call. Almost every Indian chief offered personal service in the field.

This rally of the Empire aroused a sense of an immense new comradeship which stirred the least emotional. The British Commonwealth had revealed itself as that wonderful thing for which its makers had striven and prayed—a union based not upon laws and governors, but upon the deepest feelings of the human spirit. The effect of the muster was not less profound upon our ally across the Channel. No longer, as in 1870, did France stand alone. The German armies might be thundering at her gates, but the ends of the earth were hastening to her

aid, and the avenger was drawing nigh.

CHAPTER II.
A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE WAR.

Germany had foreseen and prepared for just such a conflict as now began, and was able to put into the field in the West larger forces than those of France and Britain combined. These forces were also better trained and better supplied with transport, artillery, and machine-guns. Her plan was to defeat France and Britain in the first month, and then to turn her main armies against Russia, for she assumed that Russia would be slow to mobilize her gigantic numbers. But if the first attack on France should fail the situation would be changed, and Germany would be compelled to fight on two fronts at once, the East and the West.

If the conflict was protracted Germany would lose the advantage of numbers, for then the greater united manpower of the Allies could be trained for the field, and if the British navy continued to rule the seas those new armies could be supplied and moved at the Allies' will. Moreover, though Germany could produce most of the necessaries of life and the apparatus of war within her own borders, yet the Allied control of the sea would cut her off from certain vital kinds of war material.

The Great War falls therefore into three stages. At the start Germany, with the advantage of surprise and long preparation, embarked on a war of movement in the hope of immediate victory. She failed in this, and the campaign then became a siege in which the Allies sat round her entrenched stronghold. That vast stronghold embraced half of Europe and part of Asia; it could produce most things that it needed, and carry on its normal life. Brilliant sallies were made, which more than once nearly dispersed the besiegers; but, nevertheless, for three and a half years the Teutonic Powers were as the garrison of a beleaguered city. Then came the short, last stage, when the outworks of the fortress crumbled, and the Allies pressed in and forced the garrison to surrender.

Germany began the war with Austria as her ally. Within three months she had been joined by Turkey, and by the end of the first year of war Bulgaria mustered on her side. The Allies at the start were France, Britain, Russia, Belgium, Serbia, and Japan; in May 1915 Italy joined them, and in August 1916 Rumania. Before the end Portugal and Greece, among the European Powers, were added;

the United States of America joined in April 1917; and in the last year of the war there were altogether eleven Powers in Europe, Asia, and America on their side. The main battles were fought on the Continent of Europe, and the main belligerents, from start to finish, were the European nations. The accession of America, however, was vital for the Allied victory, as it counterbalanced the failure of Russia, which, after the revolution in March 1917, rapidly went to pieces and dropped out of the fighting line.

Before telling of any special incidents of the great struggle it is desirable to have before our minds a general bird's-eye view of the whole war. Germany's first plan of an immediate conquest was defeated by France and Britain at the First Battle of the Marne in September 1914. She made a second attempt upon the shores of the English Channel, which was foiled before Ypres in November of the same year. After that her policy was to stand on the defensive in the West and to aim at the destruction of Russia. In this, during 1915, she nearly succeeded. The Russian armies were driven out of Poland, but they established their line during the autumn, and Germany's ambitious strategy had once more failed.

In 1916 the Allies were ready for a combined advance, Germany was aware of their policy, and tried to anticipate it by her great attack on Verdun in February of that year—a battle which was fiercely contested for months, and finally ebbed away about midsummer. By that time Austria's attack on Italy had also failed and the Allied advance begun. The Russians won great successes in Galicia, and the British and French on the Somme dealt the German armies a blow from which they never really recovered. In Rumania, on the other hand, Germany had a temporary success; but by the close of 1916 it was clear to her commanders that unless some miracle happened the war would end with an Allied victory during the following year.

That miracle happened, in the form of the Russian revolution in the spring of 1917. Thereafter Germany was able to get rid of the war on her eastern frontier and to throw all her strength against the West. During that spring and summer she staved off the French and British attacks at Arras, at Ypres, and on the Aisne, and in the autumn of 1917 she was ready to begin her own offensive. Her first blow was directed against Italy, whom she drove back fifty miles from the Isonzo to the Piave, with immense losses. In March 1918 she struck her great blow in the West. With a large superiority in men and guns, she attacked the British at St. Quentin, and forced them to retreat almost to the gates of Amiens.

It was a success, but only a limited success, and with this last stroke her energy began to ebb. Foch was now Commander-in-Chief of the Allies, and with great skill he maintained a stubborn defensive till such time as he had gathered strength for a counter-attack. Meantime the new armies of America were arriving in France at the rate of 10,000 a day. In July Germany struck her last blow on

the Marne in a frantic effort to reach Paris. That blow was likewise warded off, and three days later the Allied counter-offensive began.

Then in a series of great attacks all the prepared German defences were broken down. By the early days of October Turkey and Bulgaria had been defeated in the East, and the surrender of Austria followed before the end of the month. Finally, on November 11, 1918, Germany herself was forced to sue for an armistice in order to save her armies from destruction. An armistice was granted, but its terms involved an unconditional surrender to the will of the Allies.

The episodes contained in the following chapters have been chosen as examples of the achievements of Britain and her Oversea Dominions in the Great War. They are notable episodes, which stand out from the day-to-day routine of the fighting. They are exploits, each of which materially contributed to Germany's defeat. But the qualities which they reveal in the men who shared in them were not confined to those men; they are typical qualities, and were possessed in no less degree by hundreds of thousands of men who fought in obscurity, but whose unrecorded service was equally the cause of victory. A war is won not only by the shining deeds of the few, but also by the faithfulness of the many, though it is the brilliant deeds which stand out most clearly in the world's memory and become the symbols and memorials of all the unrecorded faithfulness.

Most of the chapters belong to the attacks during the time of siege warfare, for it was by those attacks that the heart was taken out of the enemy. But we must not pass over the marvellous story of how Germany was reduced to a state of beleaguerment, and why she did not succeed in her first plan and win in a war of movement. The reason of this was a great battle, in which France played the chief part, but in which the small British army had also an honourable share. Before we begin our record, then, let us look at the stand on the Marne which wrecked the first hope of a German victory in the war.

CHAPTER III.

THE TURN AT THE MARNE.

Germany, as we have seen, began the war in the West with larger forces than those of France and Britain. She had also prepared definite plans of action, most of which she had managed to conceal from her opponents. General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, was aware of her main intention—to outflank the

French left wing by a drive through Belgium; but he did not guess how strong the enemy right wing would be, or how wide its wheel. His own plan was to strike first, and to attack the enemy's left and centre in Lorraine and in the Ardennes, where he supposed the German front would be relatively weak.

He was wrong, for he had under-estimated the number of trained divisions which Germany could place at once in the field. His attacks were repulsed both in Lorraine and in the Ardennes. At the same moment he found that the German right wing, sweeping round through Belgium, was double the strength he had expected. He hurried up troops to meet it, but at Charleroi his Fifth Army was beaten, and the British on its left were compelled to retreat along with it. The result was that on Monday, August 24, 1914, all the armies of the Allies were falling back from the northern frontiers. The men did not know what had happened; but, weary and bewildered, they kept their discipline. That the retirement was achieved without serious losses was a proof of the stoutheartedness of the armies of France and Britain.

Joffre was now compelled to make a new plan. He had to find reserves, and these would take time to collect; he could not get reinforcements brought up to his armies in time, so the armies must fall back to the reinforcements. For nearly a fortnight the retreat went on. Notable exploits were performed by every army, and the record of the retreat from Mons contains the fine defensive battle fought by the British at Le Cateau. The Allies lost heavily in the retirement, but it enabled them to reach their supports, while the enemy had weakened his strength by his long advance. On the 4th September the Allies, who at the start had been outnumbered, were now slightly more numerous than the Germans.

On that day, the 4th September, Joffre halted the retreat. He was now ready to turn and strike back. The enemy forces lay in a huge arc 200 miles wide and 30 deep—from the eastern skirts of Paris to Verdun. On the German right was Kluck, who had led the great wheel through Belgium, and next to him in order towards the east were the armies under Bülow, Hausen, the Duke of Wurtemberg, and the Imperial Crown Prince. Beyond the Meuse lay the detached German left wing, under the Crown Prince of Bavaria, threatening Nancy. The German plan was for Kluck to turn the left, and Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria the right, of the French line, while their centre broke the French centre in Champagne.

[image]

FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH
(EARL OF YPRES).

The Allies had been forced into a difficult position. From the south of the Marne their line extended to Verdun, consisting of the British Army under Sir John French, and the armies of Franchet d'Esperey, Foch, Langle de Gary, and Sarrail; while facing the Bavarians at Nancy were the armies of Castelnau and Dubail. In the meantime a new French army, the Sixth, had been formed, and this, under Maunoury, lay on the extreme left, covering Paris, and was thus in a position to threaten Kluck's right flank and rear. Joffre's new plan was to strike hard with his left, on the flank of the invader, and for this purpose he had gravely thinned the rest of his front so as to strengthen the forces of Maunoury and Franchet d'Esperey. It was a great hazard, for if the Bavarians forced the gate of Nancy the French right would be turned, and if the German centre broke through the weak French centre the battle would be lost, whatever happened on the French left.

It was one of the moments of crisis on which the world's history depends. The captains who were to win the war for the Allies were all in the field—Foch with an army, Haig with a corps, Pétain and Mangin and Allenby with divisions. Joffre told his men that on the coming fight depended the salvation of their country, and every private in the ranks felt the gravity of the hour. France was fighting on the old ground where, long centuries before, the Hun invasion had been rolled back by Theodoric the Visigoth, and the spirit of her men was kindled to a flame.

The First Battle of the Marne was won not, as many believed, by any single exploit, but by the faithful performance of its duty by each section of the long-drawn line. Let us look first at the French right flank in Lorraine. There the battle began on the 4th September, and three days later came the crisis when, by the slenderest margin, the enemy failed to break Castelnau on the ridge called the Grand-Couronné. The Kaiser himself was a spectator of the fight, for Germany had counted on forcing the pass; but by the 8th she had failed, and by the 9th Castelnau had firmly barred the gate.

The French centre, under Foch, Langle de Gary, and Sarrail, had a longer period of trial. Sarrail, at Verdun, was all but broken on the 8th, and was compelled to fall back to the west bank of the Meuse. All through the 9th and 10th the desperate struggle continued, and by the evening of the last day the French general was preparing for retreat. Suddenly, however, he found the attack ebbing, and by the 12th the enemy was mysteriously withdrawing. Farther west Langle de Gary had his worst moment on the 8th; on the 9th he received reinforcements which eased his position, and on the 10th he too felt the strange weakening of the enemy. The left centre under Foch had the sternest fight of all. He had against him the bulk of Bülow's and Hausen's armies, and on the 8th he found his flanks turned and his whole front split into gaps. Nevertheless he prepared to attack on the 9th with his last ounce of strength. All that day his centre and right were

falling back before the enemy's thrust, but he still persevered in his purpose and marched the single division he could muster to the point where he thought he could strike with the greatest effect. The blow was never delivered, for on the evening of the 9th the apparently triumphant advance halted and ebbed. Like Sarrail and Langle de Gary, Foch, having resisted to the limit of human endurance, discovered that the enemy was miraculously disappearing.

The cause of the miracle was the doings of the French left wing. Joffre had hurled Maunoury on Kluck's flank and rear, while Sir John French and Franchet d'Esperey attacked in front. Kluck met the threat with vigour and resolution. He formed front to flank, as the phrase goes—that is, he faced round to what had been his wing—and in the three days' fighting all but defeated Maunoury. On the night of the 7th the outflanking French left found itself outflanked in turn, and its attack turned into a desperate defence. But on the 9th came salvation. Kluck's manoeuvre had left a gap of 30 miles between himself and Bülow, and into this gap were pouring the British force and that of Franchet d'Esperey. Suddenly Maunoury discovered that certain villages in front of him were evacuated, and his airmen told him of enemy convoys moving to the north. At 1 p.m. that day Bülow began his retreat, and Kluck was forced to follow suit. Sir John French and Franchet d'Esperey had pierced the enemy front, and the retreat of the German right caused the retreat of all the German armies. They fell back to a line along the Aisne, through Champagne, and down the east bank of the Meuse—a strong line, which for four years was never really broken. But, none the less, it was a retreat.

The First Battle of the Marne may well rank as the greatest, because the most critical, contest of the war. It was decisive in the sense that it defeated Germany's first plan of campaign. She had hoped for a "battle without a morrow"; but the battle had been fought and the morrow was come. She was now compelled to accept the slow war of entrenchments, and to see every week bringing her nearer to the condition of a beleaguered city. The immediate cause of victory was Maunoury's flank attack, which opened the way for the British and Franchet d'Esperey. But without the daring strategy of Foch and the stubborn endurance of Langle de Gary and Sarrail—above all, without Castelnau's epic resistance at Nancy—the chance in the West could not have been seized, and the Marne might have realized Germany's hopes. It was in a sense the last battle of the old régime of war, a battle of movement and surprise and quick decisions; it was fought and won not by the army as a military machine but by the human quality of the soldier. In the last resort the source of victory was the ancient and unconquerable

spirit of France.

PART II.

THE WESTERN FRONT.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORCESTERS AT THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES.

The Battle of the Marne defeated the great plan of the Germans, and their next object was to hold what they had won. The line to which they had retired was open to attack on the west, as was also that of the French, and hence there came a period of rapid movement on both sides, each attempting to outflank the other. It became a "race for the sea," and ended only when the entrenched lines on either side reached the Belgian coast. The enemy then attempted to break through the left of the Allied front, and to seize the Channel ports, so as to threaten the British lines of communication. He transferred large numbers of his best troops to the north; between Armentiéres and the sea he had a total of 402 battalions of infantry and an immense superiority of guns. Two hundred and sixty-seven battalions were all that the Allies could fling into the gap, and their cavalry were outnumbered by two to one.

Germany struck at various points; but being checked at Arras and on the sea-coast, she made her main effort in the last week of October against the British Army, which held the salient east of the city of Ypres. The battle, which is known as the First Battle of Ypres, began on the 21st of the month, and the crisis came on the 29th, when General von Fabeck attacked with a "storm group" of specially selected regiments.

On Saturday, the 31st October, after a furious bombardment, it seemed that the end had come. For eleven days our little army had been holding its own against impossible odds. At the point of the Salient, north of the Menin road, lay the 2nd and 1st British Divisions, and south of them the 7th Division and Byng's cavalry. The men were very weary and their ranks terribly thinned. The 7th Division had fought for nearly two days on a front of 8 miles against forces of four

times their number. The desperate character of the fighting was only fully known when the losses came to be reckoned up. That division had 44 officers left out of 400, and 2,336 men out of 12,000. The 1st Brigade of the 1st Division had 8 officers left out of 153, and 500 men out of 5,000. The 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, to take one battalion, was reduced to 70 men commanded by a junior subaltern. That is the price which must be paid for fighting one against four. Major Bellenden in *Old Mortality* considered one to three the utmost possible odds, and "never knew any one who cared to take that except old Corporal Raddlebanes." At the First Battle of Ypres the British Army would have welcomed the Major's odds as a relief.

On that Saturday morning things had grown very desperate. The 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 1st Division were driven out of Gheluvelt, our line gave way, and soon after midday we were back among the woods towards Veldhoek. This retirement uncovered the left of the 7th Division, which was then slowly bent back towards the Klein Zillebeke ridge. The enemy was beginning to pour through the Gheluvelt gap, and at the same time pressed hard on the whole arc of the Salient. We had no reserves except an odd battalion or two and some regiments of cavalry, all of which had already been sorely tried during the past days. Sir John French sent an urgent message to General Foch for reinforcements and was refused. At the end of the battle he learned the reason. Foch had none to send, and his own losses had been greater than ours.

[image]

The Critical Day in the First Battle of Ypres.

Between 2 and 2.30 p.m. Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the 1st Corps, was on the Menin road watching the situation. It seemed impossible to stop the gap, though on its northern side some South Wales Borderers were gallantly holding a sunken road and galling the flank of the German advance. He gave orders to retire to a line a little west of Hooge and stand there, though he well knew that no stand, however heroic, could save the town. He considered that a further retirement west of Ypres might be necessary, and with this Sir John French agreed.

The news grew worse. The headquarters of the 1st and 2nd Divisions at Hooge Chateau had been shelled. The two commanders had been badly wounded and six of the Staff killed. Brigadiers took charge of divisions, and during that terrible afternoon officers were commanding any troops that happened to be near. It looked as if fate had designed to lay every conceivable burden on our breaking

defences.

And then suddenly out of the mad confusion came a strange story. A breathless Staff officer reported that something odd was happening north of the Menin road. The enemy advance had halted. Then came word that our 1st Division was re-forming. The anxious generals could scarcely believe their ears, for it sounded a sheer miracle; but presently came the proof, though it was not for months that the full tale was known.

This is what had happened. Brigadier-General the Hon. Charles FitzClarence, V.C., commanding the 1st (Guards) Brigade in the 1st Division, had sent in his last reserves, and had failed to fill the gap in our line. He then rode off to the headquarters of the 1st Division to explain how desperate was the position. But on the way, at the south-west corner of the Polygon Wood, he stumbled upon a battalion waiting in support. It was the 2nd Worcesters, who were part of the right brigade of the 2nd Division. FitzClarence saw in them his last chance. They belonged to another division, but it was no time to stand on ceremony. Major Hankey, who commanded them, at once put them under FitzClarence's orders.

The rain had begun and the dull wet haze of a Flanders autumn lay over the sour fields and broken spinneys between Hooge and Gheluvelt. The Worcesters, under very heavy artillery fire, advanced in a series of short rushes for about 1,000 yards between the right of the South Wales Borderers and the northern edge of Gheluvelt. There they dug themselves in, broke up the German advance into bunches, opened a heavy flank fire, and brought it to a standstill. This allowed the 7th Division to get back to its old line, and the 6th Cavalry Brigade to fill the gap between the 7th and 1st Divisions. Before night fell the German advance west of Gheluvelt was stayed, and the British front was out of immediate danger.

That great performance of an historic English county regiment is one of the few instances in any campaign where the prompt decision of a subordinate commander and the prowess of one battalion have turned the tide of a great battle. It was the crucial moment of the First Battle of Ypres. Gheluvelt was lost, but the gap was closed, and the crisis was past. Eleven days later FitzClarence fell in the last spasm of the action—the fight with the Prussian Guard. He had done his work. Ypres was soon a heap of rubble, and for four years the Salient was a cockpit of war, but up to the last hour of the campaign no German entered the ruins of the little city except as a prisoner.

CHAPTER V.

THE CANADIANS AT THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES.

The Salient of Ypres was to be a second time the scene of a heroic stand against hopeless odds. In April 1915 the front of the Salient was held by the French on the left, the Canadian Division and the British 28th Division in the centre, and the 27th Division on the right. On the 20th the Germans suddenly began the bombardment of the town with heavy shells. It was a warning to the British Command, for all their roads of supply for the lines of the Salient ran through Ypres, and such a bombardment must herald an attack on some part of their front.

The evening of Thursday, the 22nd, was calm and pleasant, with a light, steady wind blowing from the north-east. About 6.30 our artillery observers reported that a strange green vapour was moving over the French trenches. Then, as the April night closed in and the great shells still rained upon Ypres, there were strange and ghastly scenes on the left between the canal and the Pilkem road. Back through the dusk came a stream of French soldiers, blinded and coughing, and wild with terror. Some black horror had come upon them, and they had broken before a more than human fear. Behind them they had left hundreds of their comrades stricken or dead, with horrible blue faces and froth on their lips.

The rout surged over the canal, and the roads to the west were choked with broken infantry and galloping gun teams lacking their guns. Most of the French were coloured troops from Africa, and in the early darkness they stumbled upon the Canadian reserve battalions. With amazement the Canadians saw the wild dark faces, the heaving chests, and the lips speechless with agony. Then they too sniffed something in the breeze—something which caught at their throats and affected them with a deadly sickness.

[image]

The Second Battle of Ypres.

The immediate result of the stampede was a 5-mile breach in the Allied line. The remnants of the French troops were thrown back on the canal, where they were being pushed across by the German attack, and between them and the left of the Canadians were five miles of undefended country. Through this gap the enemy was pouring, preceded by the poisonous fumes of the gas, and supported by heavy artillery fire.

The Canadian front was held at the moment by the 3rd Brigade under General Turner on the left and the 2nd Brigade under General Currie on the right.

The 1st Brigade was in reserve. The 3rd Brigade, on which the chief blow fell, had suffered from the gas, but to a less degree than the French. With his flank exposed General Turner was forced to draw back his left wing. Under the pressure of the four German divisions the brigade bent backwards till its left rested on the wood east of the hamlet of St. Julien. Beyond it, however, there was still a gap, and the Germans were working round its flank.

In that wood there was a battery of British guns, and the Canadians counter-attacked to save the guns and find some point of defence for their endangered flank. Assisted by two battalions from the 1st Brigade they carried the wood. A wilder struggle has rarely been seen than the battle of that April night. The British reserves at Ypres, shelled out of the town, marched to the sound of the firing, with the strange sickly odour of the gas blowing down upon them. The roads were congested with the usual supply trains for our troops in the Salient. All along our front the cannonade was severe, while the Canadian left, bent back almost at right angles, was struggling to entrench itself under cover of counter-attacks. In some cases they found French reserve trenches to occupy, but more often they had to dig themselves in where they could. The right of the German assault was already in several places beyond the canal.

The Canadians were for the most part citizen soldiers without previous experience of battle. Among their officers were men from every kind of occupation—lawyers, professors, lumbermen, ranchers, merchants. To their eternal honour they did not break. Overwhelmed by superior numbers of men and guns, and sick to death with the poisonous fumes, they did all that men could do to stem the tide. All night long with an exposed flank they maintained the gossamer line of the British front.

Very early in the small hours of Friday morning the first British reinforcements arrived in the gap. They were a strange mixture of units, commanded by Colonel Geddes of the Buffs—to be ever afterwards gloriously known as Geddes's Detachment. But our concern for the moment is with the Canadians. The reinforcements from the 1st Brigade counter-attacked, along with Geddes's Detachment, early on the Friday morning. Meantime the Canadian 3rd Brigade was in desperate straits. Its losses had been huge, and its survivors were still weak from the effects of the gas. No food could reach it for twenty-four hours. Holding an acute salient, it was under fire from three sides, and by evening was driven to a new line through St. Julien. The enemy had succeeded in working round its left, and even getting their machine-guns behind it.

About 3 o'clock on the morning of Saturday, the 24th, a violent bombardment began. At 3.30 there came a second gas attack. The gas, pumped from cylinders, rose in a cloud which at its greatest was 7 feet high. It was thickest close to the ground, and filled every cranny of the trenches. Instinct taught some

of the men what to do. A wet handkerchief wrapped round the mouth gave a little relief, and it was obviously fatal to run back, for in that case a man followed the gas zone. Its effect was to produce acute bronchitis. Those smitten by it suffered horribly, gasping and struggling for breath, and in many cases becoming temporarily blind. Even 1,000 yards from the place of emission troops were afflicted with violent sickness and giddiness. Beyond that distance it dissipated itself, and only the blanched herbage marked its track.

That day, the 24th, saw the height of the Canadians' battle. The much-tried 3rd Brigade, now gassed for the second time, could no longer keep its place. Its left fell back well to the south-west of St. Julien. Gaps were opened in its front, and General Currie's 2nd Brigade was now left in much the same position as that of the 3rd Brigade on the Thursday evening. About midday a great German attack developed against the village of St. Julien. The remnants of the 13th and 14th battalions—the Royal Highlanders of Montreal and the Royal Montreal Regiment—could not be withdrawn in time, and remained—a few hundred men—in the St. Julien line, fighting till far on in the night their hopeless battle with a gallantry which has shed eternal lustre on their motherland. Not less fine was the stand of the 8th Battalion (the 90th Winnipeg Rifles) in the 2nd Brigade at the very point of the Salient. With its left in the air it held out against crazy odds till reinforcements arrived.

The battle was now passing from the Canadians' hands. On the Saturday the 3rd Brigade was withdrawn, and the 2nd followed on the Sunday evening. But on the Monday the latter, now less than 1,000 strong, was ordered back to the line, and to the credit of their discipline the men went cheerfully. They had to take up a position in daylight and cross the zone of shell-fire—no light task for those who had lived through the past shattering days. That night they were relieved, and on Thursday, the 29th, the whole division was withdrawn from the Salient, after such a week of fighting as has rarely fallen to the lot of any troops of the Empire.

The Canadian Division was to grow into an Army, and to win many famous triumphs before the end of the war. But in the hectic three days between Thursday, the 22nd April, and Monday, the 26th, when the Second Battle of Ypres was decided, the soldiers of Canada performed an exploit which no later achievement could excel. Three battalion commanders died; from the 5th Battalion only ten officers survived; five from the 7th; seven from the 8th; eight from the 10th. Of the machine-gun men of the 13th Battalion thirteen were left out of fifty-eight, and in the 7th Battalion only one. Attacked and outflanked by four divisions, stupefied by a poison of which they had never dreamed and which they did not understand, with no heavy artillery to support them, they endured till reinforcements came, and they did more than endure. After days and nights of tension

they had the vitality to counter-attack, and when called upon they cheerfully returned to the inferno which they had left. If the Salient of Ypres will be for all time the classic battle-ground of Britain, that blood-stained segment between the Poelcappelle and Zonnebeke roads will remain the holy land of Canadian arms.

With the Canadians must rank the men of Geddes's Detachment. They were eight battalions, picked out from anywhere in the line—the 2nd Buffs, half of the 3rd Middlesex, half of the 2nd Shropshires, the 1st York and Lancaster, the 5th Royal Lancaster, the 4th Rifle Brigade, the 9th Royal Scots, and the 2nd Cornwalls. Their instructions were to hold the gap on the Canadian left and bluff the enemy. The leading half-battalions were thrown in in twos and threes into the gap, and had to keep up the appearance of an offensive, while the other half of each battalion dug a new line. The duty of the attacking halves was to get as far forward as possible before they fell, and to try not to fall before evening.

All the day of Friday, the 23rd, without guns and without supports, about 2,000 men covered a gap 8,000 yards wide and held up the victorious Germans. Behind them the remaining 2,000 dug the new line, which was to hold fast till the end of the war. Of the half-battalions concerned in this marvellous bluff but little was left. One company of the Buffs entirely disappeared. The men of the 1st York and Lancaster lay all day in their firing lines—immovable, for every one was dead or wounded. The Cornwalls lost all their officers but one, and all their men but ninety-five.

But they succeeded. Colonel Geddes was killed by shellfire on the 28th April, when he was withdrawing his men, but he died knowing that his task had been accomplished. The Second Battle of Ypres lasted far on into May, but the enemy failed on that day, Friday, the 23rd—St. George's Day—when the road to Ypres was barred by two Canadian Brigades and a handful of British regulars and Territorials.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TAKING OF LOOS.

The battle of Loos, which began on Saturday, September 25, 1915, was part of the first combined Allied offensive. It was remarkable among other things because it saw the first appearance in a great battle of the troops of the New Armies raised in response to Lord Kitchener's appeal, and in it more than one new division

gained a reputation which made their names become household words.

The battle, though it won much ground for the Allies, failed to break the German front. But it shook that front to its foundations, and indeed at one point came very near to being a decisive victory. It is the story of that point with which this chapter is concerned—the attack of the Scottish 15th Division against the village of Loos. The 15th was a division remarkable for physique and spirit, but as yet untried in war, for it had only been some three months in France. The men were of every trade, rank, and profession, and drawn from all Scotland, both Lowlands and Highlands. On its left was an old regular division, the 1st, and on its right the 47th—a London Territorial Division. The orders of the 15th were to take Loos and the height beyond, known as Hill 70, which looked down upon the northern suburbs of Lens.

Saturday, the 25th, was a drizzling morning, with low clouds and a light wind from the south-west. The attack of the division was made by the 44th Brigade on the right and the 46th on the left, with the 45th Brigade in reserve. At ten minutes to six gas was discharged from our front, but the breeze caused it to eddy back from the hollow round Loos and trouble the left brigade. There Piper Laidlaw of the King's Own Scottish Borderers mounted the parapet and piped his men forward to the tune of "Blue Bonnets over the Border."

[image]

Battle of Loos.—Advance to Loos and Hill 70.

At 6.30 whistles blew and the leading battalions left the trenches. We are concerned particularly with the attack of the 44th Brigade, which had the 9th Black Watch and the 8th Seaforths in front, the 7th Camerons in support, and the 10th Gordons following. A wild rush carried the Highlanders through the whole German front line. Below in the hollow lay Loos with the gaunt Colossus of the mining headgear, which our men called the Tower Bridge, striding above it. In front of the village was the German second line, about 200 yards distant from the crest of the slope. Its defences were strong, and the barbed wire, deep and heavy, had been untouched by our artillery, except in a few places.

After winning the first line the attack was rapidly reorganized, and our men went hurtling down the slope. They had a long distance to cover, and all the time they were exposed to the direct fire of the German machine-guns; but without wavering the line pressed on till it reached the wire. With bleeding faces and limbs and torn kilts and tunics the Highlanders forced their way through it. These decent law-abiding ex-civilians charged like men possessed, singing and

cheering. One grave sergeant is said to have rebuked the profanity of his men. "Keep your breath, lads," he cried. "The next stop's Potsdam."

At 7.30 the second line was theirs, and a few minutes later the 44th Brigade was surging through the streets of Loos. Here they had the 47th Londoners on their right, and on their left their own 46th Brigade, and they proceeded to clear up the place as well as the confusion of units permitted.

But the Highlanders had not finished their task. It was not yet 9 o'clock, Loos was in their hands, but Hill 70, the gently sloping rise to the east of the village, was still to be won. The attacking line re-formed—what was left of the Black Watch and Seaforths leading, with the 7th Camerons and 10th Gordons. Now, the original plan had been for the attack to proceed beyond Hill 70 should circumstances be favourable, and though this plan had been modified on the eve of the battle, the change had not been explained to all the troops, and the leading battalions were in doubt about their final objective. The Highlanders streamed up the hill like hounds, with all battalion formation gone, the red tartans of the Camerons and the green of the Gordons mingling in one resistless wave. All the time they were under enfilading fire from both south and north; but with the bayonet they went through the defences, and by 9 o'clock were on the summit of the hill.

On the top, just below the northern crest, was a strong redoubt, destined to become famous in succeeding days. The garrison surrendered—they seemed scarcely to have resisted—but the Highlanders did not wait to secure the place. They poured down the eastern side, now only a few hundreds strong, losing direction as they went. They had reached a district which was one nest of German fortifications. The Highlanders were far in advance of the British line, with no supports on south or north; in three hours they had advanced nearly four miles, and had reached the skirts of the village called Cité St. Auguste.

The colonel of a Cameron battalion took command on Hill 70, now strewn with the remnants of the two brigades, and attempted to recall the pursuit, which was lost in the fog and smoke of the eastern slopes, and to entrench himself on the summit. But very few of the Highlanders returned. All down the slopes towards Lens lay the tartans—Gordon and Black Watch, Seaforth and Cameron—like the drift left on the shore when the tide has ebbed, marking out a salient of the dead which, under happier auspices, might have been a living spear-point thrust into the enemy's heart.

The rest of the doings of the 15th Division—how they held the line of Hill 70 for forty-eight hours longer till they were relieved by the Guards—does not belong to this story. Our concern is with that wild charge which from the beginning was foredoomed to failure, for the Highlanders had no supports except the divisional reserves. The Guards were then 11 miles away, and the two New Army di-

visions which were brought up—divisions which later on won great glory—were then only raw recruits. The brilliant advance was not war, but a wild berserk adventure—a magnificent but a barren feat of courage.

And yet, looking back from the vantage ground of four years of campaigning, that madness of attack had in it the seeds of the Allies' future success. It was the very plan which Ludendorff used against them with such fatal effect in March 1918. Of what did those German tactics consist? Highly-trained troops attacked various sections of the front, found weak spots, summoned their reserves by special signals, and forced their way through. In this way the front was not only pierced, but crumbled in long lengths. The Highlanders at Loos were the first to employ this deadly process, which the French called "infiltration." They were picked troops beyond question; but there was no serious plan to follow up their success, and no support provided. Yet, even as it was, that lonely charge struck fear into the heart of the whole German line from Douai to Lille. There was no prophetic eye among us which could see what was implied by it, and it was set down as a glorious failure. Four years later, when we had learned all that the enemy could teach us, the same method was applied by the master hand of Foch to break down in turn each of the German defences.

CHAPTER VII.
DELVILLE WOOD.

The Battle of the Somme was the first great British attack to be made with ample supplies of guns and shells, and continued, not for days or weeks, but for months. Slowly we pressed forward to the crest of the ridges between the Somme and the Ancre, and we know from Ludendorff's own confession that we then dealt a blow at Germany's strength from which she never recovered. The third stage of that great battle, which won many miles of the German second position, began on July 14, 1916. The one serious check was on the right wing, where it was necessary to carry the village of Longueval and the wood called Delville in order to secure our right flank. There the South African Brigade entered for the first time into the battle-line of the West, and there they won conspicuous renown.

The place was the most awkward on the battle-front. It was a salient, and, therefore, the British attack was made under fire from three sides. The ground, too, was most intricate. The land sloped upwards to Longueval village, a cluster

of houses among gardens and orchards around the junction of two roads. East and north-east of this hamlet stretched Delville Wood, in the shape of a blunt equilateral triangle, with an apex pointing north-westwards. The place, like most French woods, had been seamed with grassy rides, partly obscured by scrub, and along and athwart these the Germans had dug lines of trenches. The wood had been for some days a target for our guns, and was now a maze of splintered tree trunks, matted undergrowth, and shell-holes. North, north-east, and south-east, at a distance of from 50 to 200 yards from its edges, lay the main German positions, strongly protected by machine-guns. Longueval could not be firmly held unless Delville was also taken, for the northern part was commanded by the wood.

On the 14th July two Scottish brigades of the 9th Division attacked Longueval, and won most of the place; but they found that the whole village could not be held until Delville Wood was cleared. Accordingly, the South Africans—the remaining brigade of the division—were ordered to occupy the wood on the following morning. The South African Brigade, under General Lukin, had been raised a year before among the white inhabitants of South Africa. At the start about 15 per cent. were Dutch, but the proportion rose to something like 30 per cent. before the end of the campaign. Men fought in its ranks who had striven against Britain in the Boer War. Few units were better supplied with men of the right kind of experience, and none showed a better physical standard or a higher level of education and breeding.

Two hours before dawn on the 15th July the brigade advanced from Montauban towards the shadow which was Delville Wood, and the jumbled masonry, now spouting fire like a volcano, which had been Longueval. Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner of the 2nd South African Regiment was in command of the attack. By 2.40 that afternoon Tanner reported to General Lukin that he had won the whole wood with the exception of certain strong points in the north-west, abutting on Longueval and the northern orchards.

But the problem of Delville was not so much to carry the wood as to hold it. The German counter-attacks began about 3 o'clock, and the men who were holding the fringe of the wood suffered heavy casualties. As the sun went down the enemy activity increased, and their shells and liquid fire turned the darkness of night into a feverish and blazing noon; often as many as 400 shells were fired in a minute. The position that evening was that the north-west corner of the wood remained with the enemy, but that all the rest was held by South Africans strung out very thin along its edge. Twelve infantry companies, now gravely weakened, were defending a wood a little less than a square mile in area—a wood on which every German battery was accurately ranged, and which was commanded at close quarters by a semicircle of German trenches. Moreover, since the enemy

had the north-west corner, he had a covered way of approach into the place.

All through the furious night of the 15th the South Africans worked for dear life at entrenchments. In that hard soil, pitted by unceasing shell-fire, and cumbered with a twisted mass of tree trunks, roots, and wire, the spade could make little way. Nevertheless, when the morning of Sunday, the 16th, dawned, a good deal of cover had been provided. At 10 a.m. an attempt was made by the South Africans and a battalion of Royal Scots to capture the northern entrance to the wood. The attempt failed, and the attacking troops had to fall back to their trenches, and for the rest of the day had to endure a steady, concentrated fire. It was hot, dusty weather, and the enemy's curtain of shells made it almost impossible to bring up food and water or to remove the wounded. The situation was rapidly becoming desperate. Longueval and Delville had proved to be far too strongly held to be over-run at the first attack by one division. At the same time, until these were taken the object of the battle of the 14th had not been achieved, and the safety of the whole right wing of the new front was endangered. Longueval could not be won and held without Delville; Delville could not be won and held without Longueval. Fresh troops could not yet be spared to complete the work, and it must be attempted again by the same wearied and depleted battalions. What strength remained to the 9th Division must be divided between two simultaneous objectives.

That Sunday evening it was decided to make another attempt against the north-west corner. The attempt was made shortly before dawn on Monday, the 17th July, but failed. All that morning there was no change in the situation; but on the morning of Tuesday, the 18th, an attempt was made to the eastward. The Germans, however, in a counter-attack, managed to penetrate far into the southern half of the wood. The troops in Longueval had also suffered misfortunes, with the result that the enemy entered the wood on the exposed South African left.

[image]

Battle of the Somme.—Longueval and Delville Wood.

At 2.30 that afternoon the position was very serious. Lieutenant-Colonel Thackeray, of the 3rd South African Regiment, now commanding in the wood, held no more than the south-west corner. In the other parts the garrisons had been utterly destroyed. The trenches were filled with wounded whom it was impossible to move, since most of the stretcher-bearers had themselves been killed or wounded.

That evening came the welcome news that the South Africans would be relieved at night by another brigade. But relief under such conditions was a slow and difficult business. By midnight the work had been partially carried out, and portions of the 3rd and 4th South African regiments had been withdrawn.

But as at Flodden, when

> "they left the darkening heath
> More desperate grew the strife of death."

The enemy had brought up a new division, and made repeated attacks against the South African line. For two days and two nights the little remnant under Thackeray still clung to the south-west corner of the wood against impossible odds, and did not break. The German method of assault was to push forward bombers and snipers, and then to advance in mass formation from the north, north-east, and north-west simultaneously.

Three attacks on the night of Tuesday, the 18th, were repelled with heavy losses to the enemy; but in the last of them the South Africans were assaulted on three sides. All through Wednesday, the 19th, the gallant handful suffered incessant shelling and sniping, the latter now from very close. It was the same on Thursday, the 20th; but still relief tarried. At last, at 6 o'clock that evening, troops of a fresh division were able to take over what was left to us of Longueval and the little segment of Delville Wood. Thackeray marched out with two officers, both wounded, and 140 other ranks, gathered from all the regiments of the South African Brigade.

The six days and five nights during which the South African Brigade held the most difficult post on the British front—a corner of death on which the enemy fire was concentrated from three sides at all hours, and into which fresh German troops, vastly superior in numbers, made periodic incursions, only to be broken and driven back—constituted an epoch of terror and glory scarcely equalled in the campaign. There were other positions as difficult, but they were not held so long; there were cases of as protracted a defence, but the assault was not so violent and continuous.

Let us measure it by the stern test of losses. At midnight on the 14th July, when Lukin received his orders, the brigade numbered 121 officers and 3,032 men. When Thackeray marched out on the 20th he had a remnant of 143, and the total ultimately assembled was about 750. Of the officers, 23 were killed or died of wounds, 47 were wounded, and 15 were missing. But the price was not paid in vain. The brigade did what it was ordered to do, and did not yield until it was withdrawn.

There is no more solemn moment in war than the parade of men after a

battle. The few hundred haggard survivors in the bright sunshine behind the lines were too weary and broken to realize how great a thing they had done. Sir Douglas Haig sent his congratulations. The Commander of the Fourth Army, Sir Henry Rawlinson, wrote that "In the capture of Delville Wood the gallantry, perseverance, and determination of the South African Brigade deserves the highest commendation." They had earned the praise of their own intrepid commanding officers, who had gone through the worst side by side with their men. "Each individual," said Tanner's report, "was firm in the knowledge of his confidence in his comrades, and was, therefore, able to fight with that power which good discipline alone can produce. A finer record of this spirit could not be found than the line of silent bodies along the Strand,[#] over which the enemy had not dared to tread." But the most impressive tribute was that of their Brigadier. When the remnant of his brigade paraded before him, Lukin took the salute with uncovered head and eyes not free from tears.

[#] The name of one of the rides in the wood.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES.

The Third Battle of Ypres was in many ways the sternest battle ever fought by British troops. It was not a defence, like the two other actions fought at Ypres, but an attack. It was an attack against the success of which the very stars in their courses seemed to fight. Everything—weather, landscape, events elsewhere on the front—conspired to frustrate its purpose. It was undertaken too late and continued too long; but both errors were unavoidable. All the latter part of it was a struggle without hope, carried on for the sake of our Allies at other parts of the line. To those who fought in it, the Third Battle of Ypres will always remain a memory of misery and horror.

The British scheme for the summer of 1917 was an offensive against the enemy in Flanders, in order to clear the Belgian coast and turn the German right flank in the West. It was a scheme which, if successful, promised the most far-reaching results; but to be successful a beginning must be made as early as possible in the summer, when the waterlogged soil of Flanders became reasonably dry.

But the whole plan was altered for the worse at the beginning of the year. The first stage, the Battle of Arras, began too late and, through no fault of the British Command, lasted too long. It was not till June that Sir Douglas Haig was able to begin operations in Flanders and make his preliminary attack upon Messines, and it was not till the end of July that the great battle was begun in the Ypres Salient. By that time the revolution which began in Petrograd in March had broken up the Russian armies and prepared the way for the triumph of Bolshevism; Russia was in ruins, and Germany was moving her troops rapidly from the East to the West. The battle was, therefore, a struggle against time—against the coming of enemy reserves and of the autumn rains.

The famous Salient of Ypres had, during three years, been drawn back till the enemy front was now less than two miles from the town. For twelve months that front had been all but stationary, and the Germans had spent infinite ingenuity and labour on perfecting their defences. In the half-moon of hills round the town they had view-points which commanded the whole countryside, and especially the British lines within the Salient. Any preparations for attack would therefore be conducted under their watchful eyes. Moreover, the heavy waterlogged clay of the flats where our front lay was terribly at the mercy of the weather, and in rain became a bottomless swamp. Lastly, the enemy was acutely conscious of the importance of holding his position, and there was no chance of taking him by surprise.

[image]

FIELD-MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG (EARL HAIG OF BEMERSYDE).

If the British were to succeed at all they must succeed quickly. The high ground east of the Salient must be won in a fortnight if they were to move against the German bases in West Flanders and clear the coast. This meant a gamble against the weather, for the Salient was, after Verdun, the most tortured of the Western battlefields. Constant shelling of the low ground west of the ridges had blocked the streams and the natural drainage, and turned it into a sodden wilderness. Weather such as had been experienced the year before on the Somme would make of it a morass where transport could scarcely move, and troops would be exposed to the last degree of misery. Moreover, the "tanks," which had been first used on the Somme the year before, and had done wonders at Arras in breaking through barbed wire and silencing machine-guns, could not be used in deep mud. Whatever might be the strength and skill of the enemy, it was less formidable

than the obstacles which nature herself might place in the British path.

But the German commanders were no despicable antagonists. In Flanders the nature of the ground did not permit of the kind of defence which they had built on the Somme. Deep dug-outs and concrete trenches were impossible because of the waterlogged soil, and they were compelled to employ new tactics. Their solution was the "pill-box." This was a small concrete fort situated among the ruins of a farm or in some piece of shell-torn woodland, often raised only a yard or two above the ground-level, and bristling with machine-guns. The low entrance was at the rear of the pill-box, which held from eight to forty men. Such forts were easy to make, for the wooden or steel framework could be brought up on any dark night and filled with concrete. They were placed with great skill, and in the barbed-wire defences alleys were left so that an unwary advance would be trapped and exposed to enfilading fire. Their small size made them a difficult mark for heavy guns, and since they were protected by concrete at least 3 feet thick they were impregnable to ordinary field artillery.

The enemy's plan was to hold his first line—which was often a mere string of shell craters—with few men, who would fall back before an assault. He had his guns well behind, so that they would not be captured in the first rush, and would be available for a barrage if his opponents became entangled in the pill-box zone. Lastly, he had his reserves in the second line, ready for the counterstroke before the attack could secure its position. Such tactics were admirably suited to the exposed and contorted ground of the Salient. Any attack would be allowed to make some advance; but if the German plan worked well this advance would be short-lived, and would be dearly paid for. Instead of the cast-iron front of the rest of the battleground, the Flanders line would be highly elastic, but after pressure it would spring back into position with a deadly rebound.

The action began on 31st July, and resulted at first in a brilliant success. But with the attack the weather broke, and so made impossible the series of blows which we had planned. For a fortnight we were compelled to hold our hand; till the countryside grew drier, advance was a stark impossibility.

The second stage began on 16th August, and everywhere fell short of its main objective. The ground was sloppy and tangled; broken woods impeded our advance; and the whole front was dotted with pill-boxes, against which we had not yet discovered the proper weapon. The result was a serious British check. Fine brigades had been hurled in succession against a solid wall, and had been sorely battered. They felt that they were being sacrificed blindly; that every fight was a soldier's and not a general's fight; and that such sledge-hammer tactics could never solve the problem. For a moment there was a real wave of disheartenment in the British ranks.

Sir Douglas Haig took time to reorganize his front and prepare a new plan.

Sir Herbert Plumer was brought farther north, and patiently grappled with the "pill-box" problem. He had them carefully reconnoitred, and by directing gun fire on each side enabled his troops to get round their undefended rear. Early in September the weather improved, the mud of the Salient hardened, and the streams became streams again, and not lagoons.

On 20th September the third attack was launched, and everywhere succeeded. It broke through the German defence in the Salient, and won the southern pivot, on which the security of the main Passchendaele Ridge depended. Few struggles in the campaign were more desperate or carried out on a more gruesome battlefield. The maze of quagmires, splintered woods, ruined husks of pill-boxes, water-filled shell-holes and foul creeks, which made up the land on both sides of the Menin road, was a sight which to most men must seem in the retrospect a fevered nightmare. The elements had blended with each other to make of it a limbo outside mortal experience and almost beyond human imagining.

But successful though the advance was, not even the first stage of the British plan had been reached. During the rest of September and October, however, attack followed attack, though the main objective was now out of the question. It was necessary to continue the battle for the sake of our Allies, who at the moment were hard pressed in other areas; and, in any case, it was desirable to complete the capture of the Passchendaele Ridge so as to give us a good winter position.

The last stages of this Third Battle of Ypres were probably the muddiest combats ever known in the history of war. It rained incessantly, sometimes quieting to a drizzle or a Scots mist, but relapsing into a downpour on any day fixed for our attack. The British movements became a barometer. Whenever it was more than usually tempestuous it was safe to assume that some hour of advance was near. The few rare hours of watery sunshine had no effect upon the irreclaimable bog. "You might as well," wrote one observer, "try to empty a bath by holding lighted matches over it."

On the 30th October our line was sufficiently far advanced for the attack on Passchendaele itself. On that day the Canadians, assisted by the Royal Naval Division and London Territorials, carried much of the Ridge, and won their way into the outskirts of Passchendaele village. Some days of dry weather followed, and early in the morning of 6th November the Canadians swept forward again and carried the whole main ridge of West Flanders. By this achievement the Salient, where for three years we had been at the mercy of the German guns, was no longer dominated by the enemy position.

The Third Battle of Ypres was strategically a British failure; we did not come within measurable distance of our main purpose. But that was due to no fault of generalship or fighting qualities, but to the malevolence of the weather in

a country where the weather was all in all. We reckoned upon a normal August, and we did not get it. The sea of mud which lay around the Salient was the true defence of the enemy.

Ypres was to Britain what Verdun was to France—hallowed soil, which called forth the highest qualities of her people. It was a battleground where there could be no retreat without loss of honour. The armies which fought there in the Third Battle were very different from the few divisions which had held the fort during the earlier struggles. But there were links of connection. The Guards, by more than one fine advance, were recompensed for the awful tension of October 1914, when some of their best battalions had been destroyed; and it fell to Canada, by the victory of Passchendaele, to avenge the gas attack of April 1915. when only her dauntless two brigades stood between Ypres and the enemy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TANKS AT CAMBRAI.

During the Battle of the Somme a new weapon had appeared on the Allied side. This was the Tank (so called because some unrevealing name had to be found for a device developed in secret). It was a machine shaped like a monstrous toad, which mounted machine-guns and light artillery, and could force its way through wire and parapets and walls, and go anywhere except in deep mud. Its main tactical use was to break down wire entanglements and to clear out redoubts and nests of machine-guns. When first used at the Somme the Tanks won a modified success, and in the following spring at Arras they fully justified themselves. Presently they began to develop into two types, one remaining heavy and slow and the other becoming a "whippet," a type which was easy to handle and attained a fair speed. Ultimately, as we shall see, they were to become the chief Allied weapon in breaking the enemy front, and also to perform the historic task of cavalry and go through the gaps which the infantry had made. In September 1917, while two British Armies were fighting desperately in the Ypres Salient for the Passchendaele Ridge, Sir Julian Byng's Third Army, on the chalky plateau of Picardy, was almost idle. An observer might have noticed that General Hugh Elles, the commander of the Tank Corps, was a frequent visitor to Sir Julian's headquarters at Albert. The same observer might have detected a curious self-consciousness during the following weeks at Tanks headquarters. Tanks officers, disguised in

non-committal steel helmets and waterproofs, frequented the forward areas of the Third Army. Tanks motor-cars seemed suddenly to shed all distinguishing badges, and their drivers told lengthy and mendacious tales about their doings. Staff officers of the Tanks were never seen at any headquarters, but constantly in front-line trenches, where, when questioned, they found some difficulty in explaining their business. At the headquarters of one Tanks brigade there was a locked room, with "No Admittance" over the door, and inside—for the eye of the possible enemy spy—a quantity of carefully marked bogus maps. Some mystery was being hatched, but, though many hundreds suspected it, only a few knew the truth.

On the 20th October it had been decided to make a surprise attack towards Cambrai, and to prepare the way for the infantry by Tanks instead of guns. The Third Battle of Ypres had brought the reputation of these machines very low. They had been used in the bottomless mud of the Salient, where they had no chance of being successful, and the generals in command had reported adversely on their merits. It was argued that they could not negotiate bad ground, that the ground on a battlefield must always be bad, and that, consequently, they were of no use on the battlefield. The first statement was doubtful, and the second false; but certainly if all battles had been like the Third Battle of Ypres the conclusion would have been justified.

At Cambrai the Tanks were on their trial. It was their special "show," and if they failed now they would fail for good. Their commander, General Elles, took no chances. With three brigades of Tanks he was to break through the enemy's wire, cross the broad trenches of the Hindenburg Line, and open the way towards Cambrai for the two Army Corps following. The enemy defences were the strongest in the West. There were three trench lines, each of a width extending to 15 feet, and with an outpost line thrown forward as a screen. In front of the main line lay barbed wire at least 50 yards wide, which sometimes jutted out in bold salients flanked by machine-guns. It was calculated that to cut that wire with artillery would have taken five weeks and cost twenty millions of money. The trenches were too wide for an ordinary Tank, so immense bundles of brushwood were made up, which a Tank carried on its nose and dropped into the trench to make a crossing. Each bundle, or "fascine," weighed a ton and a half, and it took twenty Chinese coolies to roll one of them through the mud.

The attack was to be a surprise, and therefore there was to be no preliminary bombardment. Secrecy was so vital, and the chances of discovery so numerous, that the commanders spent anxious days prior to the 20th November. Flotillas of Tanks were assembled in every possible place which afforded cover, notably in Havrincourt Wood. The Tank is not a noiseless machine, and it says much for the ingenuity of the Third Army that the enemy had no inkling of our

business. A single enemy aeroplane over Havrincourt might have wrecked the plan. On the night of the 18th an enemy raid took some of our men prisoners, but they must have been very staunch, or the German Intelligence Service very obtuse, for little appears to have been learned from them. The weather favoured Sir Julian Byng. The days before the assault had the low grey skies and the clinging mists of late November.

In the dark of the evening of the 19th the Tanks nosed their way from their lairs towards the point of departure, going across country, since the roads were crowded, and running dead slow to avoid noise. That evening General Hugh Elles issued a special order announcing that he proposed to lead the attack of the centre division in person, like an admiral in his flagship. At 4.30 on the morning of the 20th a burst of German fire suggested that the enemy had discovered the secret, but to the relief of the British commanders it died away, and the hour before the attack opened was dead quiet.

[image]

Cambrai—the Advance of the Infantry Divisions on November 20.

Day dawned with heavy clouds that promised rain before evening. At 6 o'clock a solitary gun broke the silence. It was the signal, and from just north of the Bapaume road to the hamlet of Gonnelieu in the south, a stupendous barrage crashed from the British line. The whole horizon was aflame, and volcanoes of earth spouted from the German lines. Wakened suddenly from sleep, and dazed with the gun-fire, the enemy sent up star shell after star shell in appeal to his artillery; but, as he strove to man his trenches, out of the fog of dawn came something more terrible than shells—the blunt noses of 350 Tanks tearing and snapping the wire and grinding down the parapets. The instant result was panic. In a few minutes the German outposts fell; presently the main Hindenburg Line followed, and the fighting reached the tunnels of the reserve line. By half-past 10 that also had vanished, and the British infantry, with cavalry close behind, was advancing in open country.

General Elles, in his flagship "Hilda," was first in the advance, and it was reported that he did much of his observing with his head thrust through the hatch in the roof, using his feet on the gunner's ribs to indicate the direction of targets. The "Hilda" flew the flag of the Tank Corps; that flag was several times hit, but not brought down. Comedy was not absent from that wild day. One member of a Tank crew lost his wig as his head emerged from the man-hole, and the official mind was racked for months with the problem whether this came under the head

of loss of field equipment, of a limb, or clothing. Nor was heroism wanting on the enemy's side. The British official dispatch records one instance. "Many of the hits upon our defences at Flesquières were obtained by a German artillery officer who, remaining alone at his battery, served a field-gun single-handed until killed at his gun. The great bravery of this officer aroused the admiration of all ranks."

The trial of the Tanks was over. The Battle of Cambrai did not realize to the full the expectations of the British Command. Great successes were won, but our reserves were too scanty to maintain them, and before the battle died away we lost much of the ground we had gained. But of the success of the Tanks there was no question. They stood forth as the most valuable tactical discovery of the campaigns, the weapon which enabled a commander-in-chief to obtain the advantage of surprise and to attack swiftly and secretly on new fronts. It was this weapon which, in the hand of Foch, was destined to break in turn each section of the German defences, and within a year from Cambrai to give the Allies victory.

CHAPTER X.

THE SOUTH AFRICANS AT MARRIÈRES WOOD.

In the spring of 1918, owing to the Russian Revolution, the Germans were able to concentrate all their strength in the West. Their aim was to break the Allied front by separating the French and the British before the United States of America could send her armies to the field. The attempt came very near success. The first blow fell on Thursday, 21st March; by the Saturday evening Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army was in retreat, and it seemed as if nothing could save Amiens.

The South African Brigade was part of the 9th Division, on the extreme left of the Fifth Army. It was in action from the first hour of the battle, and for two days, at the cost of some 900 casualties, it prevented a breach opening up at the worst danger-point—the junction of the armies of Byng and Gough. On the Saturday it was given a short time in reserve, but that afternoon it was again called into the fight. That evening General Tudor, commanding the 9th Division, visited its Brigadier, General Dawson. The 9th Division was holding an impossibly long line, and both its flanks were in the air. The South Africans were instructed to withdraw after dark to a position just west of the Arras-Péronne road and the village of Bouchavesnes. The orders were that this line was to be held "*at all costs.*" Dawson accordingly began to withdraw his men about 9.45,

and by 3 a.m. on the morning of Sunday, the 24th, the brigade was in position in the new line.

When the Sunday dawned the two regiments of South Africans were holding a patch of front which, along with Delville Wood, is the most famous spot in all their annals. The ground sloped eastward, and then rose again to another ridge about a thousand yards distant—a ridge which gave the enemy excellent posts for observation and machine-gun positions. There were one good trench and several bad ones, and the whole area was dotted with shell-holes. Dawson took up his headquarters in a support trench some three hundred yards in rear of the front line. The strength of the brigade was about five hundred in all. Dawson's only means of communication with divisional headquarters was by runners, and he had long lost touch with the divisional artillery.

It was a weary and broken little company which waited on that hilltop in the fog of dawn. During three days the five hundred had fought a score of battles. Giddy with lack of sleep, grey with fatigue, poisoned by gas and tortured by the ceaseless bombardment, officers and men had faced the new perils which each hour brought forth with a fortitude beyond all human praise. But wars are fought with the body as well as with the spirit, and the body was breaking. Since the 20th of March, while the men had received rations, they had had no hot food or tea. Neither they nor their officers had any guess at what was happening elsewhere. They seemed to be isolated in a campaign of their own, shut out from all knowledge of their fellows and beyond the hope of mortal aid.

Soon after daylight had struggled through the fog the enemy was seen massing his troops on the ridge to the east, and about 9 o'clock he deployed for the attack, opening with machine-gun fire, and afterwards with artillery. Dawson, divining what was coming, sent a messenger back to the rear with the brigade records. He had already been round every part of the position, and had disposed his scanty forces to the best advantage. At 10 o'clock some British guns opened an accurate fire, not upon the enemy, but upon the South African lines, especially on the trench where brigade headquarters were situated. Dawson was compelled to move to a neighbouring shell-hole. He sent a man on his last horse, followed by two runners, to tell the batteries what was happening, but the messengers do not seem to have reached their goal, and the fire continued for more than an hour, though happily with few casualties. After that it ceased, because the guns had retired. One of our heavies continued to fire on Bouchavesnes, and presently that, too, became silent.

It was the last the brigade heard of the British artillery.

Meantime the enemy gun-fire had become intense, and the whole position was smothered in dust and fumes. Men could not keep their rifles clean because of the debris filling the air. The Germans were now some 750 yards from our

front, but did not attempt for the moment to approach closer, fearing the accuracy of the South African marksmanship. The firing was mostly done at this time by Lewis guns, for the ammunition had to be husbanded, and the men were ordered not to use their rifles till the enemy was within 400 yards. The Germans attempted to bring a field-gun into action at a range of 1,000 yards, but a Lewis gunner of the 1st Regiment knocked out the team before the gun could be fired. A little later another attempt was made, and a field-gun was brought forward at a gallop. Once again the fire of the same Lewis gunner proved its undoing. The team got out of hand, and men and horses went down in a struggling mass.

This sight cheered the thin ranks of the defence, and about noon came news which exalted every heart. General Tudor sent word that the 35th Division had arrived at Bray-sur-Somme, and had been ordered to take up position 1,000 yards in rear of the brigade. For a moment it seemed as if they still might make good their stand. But the 35th Division was a vain dream; it was never during that day within miles of the South Africans. Dawson sent back a report on the situation to General Tudor.

It was the last communication of the brigade with the outer world.

At midday the frontal attack had been held, an attack on the south had been beaten off, and also a very dangerous movement in the north. The grass was as dry as tinder. The enemy had set fire to it, and, moving behind the smoke as a screen, managed to work his way to within 200 yards of our position in the north. There, however, he was again checked. But by this time the German thrust elsewhere on the front was having successes. Already the enemy was in Combles on the north, and at Péronne and Cléry on the south. The 21st Division on the right had gone, and the other brigades of the 9th Division on the South African left were being forced back. At about 2.30 an officer, with some 30 men, began to withdraw on that flank, under the impression that a general retirement had been ordered. As they passed headquarters, Major Cochran and Captain Beverley, with Regimental Sergeant-Major Keith of the 4th Regiment, went out under a concentrated machine-gun fire to stop them. The party at once returned to the firing line, and were put into shell-holes on the north flank. Unhappily Cochran was hit in the neck by a machine-gun bullet and died within three minutes.

Early in the afternoon Dawson attempted to adjust his remnant. The enemy now was about 200 yards from his front, and far in on his flank and rear. Major Ormiston took out some 25 men as a flank-guard for the left, in doing which he was dangerously wounded. All wounded men who could hold a rifle were stopped on their way to the dressing-station and sent back to the front line, and in no single instance did they show any reluctance to return. Ammunition was conserved with noble parsimony, and the last round was collected from those who had fallen. But it was now clear that the enemy was well to the west

of the brigade, for snipers' fire began to come from the rear. Unless the miracle of miracles happened, the limit of endurance must be reckoned not in hours but in minutes. For the moment the most dangerous quarter seemed to be the north, and Lieutenant Cooper of the 2nd Regiment, with 20 men, was sent out to make a flank-guard in shell-holes 100 yards from brigade headquarters. The little detachment did excellent work, but their casualties were heavy, and frequent reinforcements had to be sent out to them. Lieutenant Cooper himself was killed by a fragment of shell.

As it drew towards 3 o'clock there came a last flicker of hope. The enemy in the north seemed to be retiring. The cry got up, "We can see the Germans surrendering," and at the same time the enemy artillery lengthened their range and put down a heavy barrage 700 yards to the west of the brigade. It looked as if the 35th Division had arrived, and for a little there was that violent revulsion of feeling which comes to those who see an unlooked-for light in darkness. The hope was short-lived. All that had happened was that the enemy machine-guns and snipers to the west of the brigade were causing casualties to his own troops to the east. He therefore assumed that they were British reinforcements.

About this time Lieutenant-Colonel Heal, commanding the 1st Regiment, was killed. He had already been twice wounded in the action, but insisted on remaining with his men. He had in the highest degree every quality which makes a fine soldier. I quote from a letter of one of his officers: "By this time it was evident to all that we were bound to go under, but even then Colonel Heal refused to be depressed. God knows how he kept so cheery all through that hell; but right up to when I last saw him, about five minutes before he was killed, he had a smile on his face and a pleasant word for us all."

All afternoon the shell-fire had been terrific. A number of light trench-mortars were also firing against the north-east corner of our front and causing heavy losses. The casualties had been so high that the whole line was now held only by a few isolated groups, and control was impossible. About 4 o'clock Christian made his way to Dawson and told him that he feared his men could not hold out much longer. Every machine-gun and Lewis gun was out of action, the ammunition was nearly gone, the rifles were choked, and the breaking-point of human endurance had been reached. The spirit was still unconquered, but the body was fainting.

Dawson had still the shadow of a hope that he might maintain his ground until dark, and then fight his way out. Like all good soldiers in such circumstances, he was harassed by doubts. The brigade was doomed; even if the struggle could be protracted till dusk, only a fragment could escape. Had he wished to withdraw he must have begun in the early morning, as soon as the enemy appeared, for once the battle was joined the position was a death trap. He had

orders from the division to hold his ground "at all costs"—a phrase often given a vague meaning in war, but in this case taken literally. He wondered whether the stand might be of value to the British front, or whether it was not a useless sacrifice. He could only fall back for comfort on his instructions. He wrote thus in his diary: "I cannot see that under the circumstances I had any option but to remain till the end. Far better go down fighting against heavy odds than that it should be said we failed to carry out our orders. To retire would be against all the traditions of the Service."

Some time after 4.15, enemy masses appeared to the north-east of brigade headquarters. It was the final attack, for which three fresh battalions had been brought up, and the assault was delivered in close formation. There were now only 100 South Africans, some of them already wounded. There was not a cartridge left in the front line, and very few anywhere except in the pistols of the officers. Had they had ammunition they might have held even this last attack; as it was, it could be met only by a few scattered shots. The South Africans had resisted to the last moment when resistance was possible; and now they had no weapon. The Germans surged down upon a few knots of unarmed men. Dawson, with Christian and Beverley, walked out in front of a group which had gathered round them, and was greeted by the Germans with shouts of "Why have you killed so many of us?" and "Why did you not surrender sooner?" One man said, "Now we shall soon have peace," at which Dawson shook his head. Before he went eastward into captivity he was allowed to find Cochran's body and rescue his papers.

In all that amazing retreat, when our gossamer front refused to be broken by the most overwhelming odds, no British division did more nobly than the 9th. It held a crucial position in the line, and only by its stubborn endurance was a breach between Gough and Byng prevented. Among the brigades of the 9th, the chief brunt was borne by the South African.

Let us take the testimony of the enemy. During the German advance, Captain Peirson, the brigade major of another division, was taken prisoner. When he was examined at German headquarters an officer asked him if he knew the 9th Division; for, said he, "we consider that the fight put up by that division was one of the best on the whole of your front, especially the last stand of the South African Brigade, which we can only call magnificent." In the course of his journey to Le Cateau Captain Peirson was spoken to by many German officers, all of whom mentioned the wonderful resistance of the South Africans. There is a still more striking tribute. On the road to Le Cateau a party of British officers was stopped by the Emperor, who asked if any one present belonged to the 9th Division. "I want to see a man of that division," he said, "for if all divisions had fought as well as the 9th I would not have had any troops left to carry on the

attack."

It was no piece of fruitless gallantry. Dawson, as he was tramping eastwards, saw a sight which told him that his decision had been right, and that his work had not been in vain. The whole road for miles east of Bouchavesnes was blocked by a continuous double line of transport and guns, which proved that the South Africans had for over seven hours held up not only a mass of German infantry, but all the artillery and transport advancing on the Bouchavesnes-Combles highway. Indeed, it is not too much to say that on that feverish Sabbath the stand of the brigade saved the British front. It was the hour of Von der Marwitz's most deadly thrust. While Gough was struggling at the Somme crossings, the Third Army had been forced west of Morval and Bapaume, far over our old battle-ground of the First Battle of the Somme. The breach between the two armies was hourly widening. But for the self-sacrifice of the brigade at Marrières Wood and the delay in the German advance at its most critical point, it is doubtful whether Byng could ever have established that line on which, before the end of March, he held the enemy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE OF THE LYS.

By 6th April 1918 the great German thrust towards Amiens had failed, and for the moment the gate of the Somme was closed. The city was under fire, the enemy was before its gates, but his strength was exhausted and he could not advance. Therefore his chief plan—of separating the French and the British—had come to nought. Brought to a standstill, he cast about for a diversion, for he could not permit the battle to decline into a stalemate, since he was fighting against time. His main purpose remained the same, but he sought to achieve it by a new method. He would attack the British elsewhere, on some part of the front where they were notoriously weak, and compel Foch to use up his reserves in its defence. Then, when the Allied resources had shrunk, he would strike again at the weakened door of Amiens. On the German side the operation was meant to be merely subsidiary, designed to prepare the way for the accomplishment of the main task farther south. They proposed to choose a battle-ground where even a small force might obtain important results. But so stoutly did the meagre British divisions resist that the enemy was compelled to extend the battle well into May,

to squander thirty-five of his fresh divisions, and to forfeit for good his chance of final victory.

The new battle-ground was the area on both sides of the river Lys, between the La Bassée Canal and the Wytschaete Ridge. The German Staff knew that our front line had already been thinned to supply ten divisions for the struggle in the south, and at the moment it was weakly held, mainly by troops exhausted in the Somme battle. The enemy Staff chose their ground well. They had the great city of Lille behind them to screen the assembly. Certain key-points, such as Béthune and Hazebrouck, lay at no great distance behind the British front. The British communications were poor, while the German were all but perfect. If the enemy could break through at once between La Bassée and Armentières and capture Béthune, he could swing north-westward and take Hazebrouck and the hills beyond Bailleul, and so threaten the Channel Ports, on which the British armies depended for supplies.

The attack began on Tuesday, 9th April. A Portuguese division south of the Lys was driven in at the first thrust, and through the gap the enemy streamed in. At a quarter-past ten that morning he was more than a mile to the rear of the division holding the left of the gap, which was accordingly compelled to retreat. On the right of the gap, covering Béthune, lay the 55th West Lancashire Division. The story of the Lys is a story of the successful defence of key-points against critical odds, and Givenchy, where the men of West Lancashire stood, was most vital, for unless it fell Béthune could not be taken, and unless Béthune were captured at once the enemy attack would be cramped into too narrow a gate. The 55th Division did not yield though outnumbered by four to one. They moved back their left flank but they still covered Béthune, and their right at Givenchy stood like a rock. By noon the enemy was in the ruins of Givenchy; in the afternoon the Lancashire men had recovered them; in the evening they were again lost, and in the night retaken. This splendid defence was the deciding event in the first stage of the battle. It was due, said the official report, "in great measure to the courage and determination displayed by our advance posts. Among the many gallant deeds recorded of them, one instance is known of a machine-gun which was kept in action although the German infantry had entered the rear compartment of the pill-box from which it was firing, the gun team holding up the enemy by revolver fire from the inner compartment."

Next day, 10th April, a new German army attacked north of the Lys, captured Messines, and was pouring over the Wytschaete crest. But at Wytschaete stood the 9th Division, which we have previously seen in action on the Somme at Marrières Wood. There its South African Brigade had been completely destroyed, but a new one had been got together, and this second showed all the heroism of the first. That night they retook Messines, and during the evening

cleared the Wytschaete Ridge. That stand saved the British northern flank and gave its commander time to adjust his front. For thirty hours the Germans were held up on that ridge, and when they finally advanced the worst danger was past.

The situation was still most critical. The French were sending troops, but with all possible resources utilized we were still gravely outnumbered, and the majority of the men were desperately weary from the Somme battle. On the 11th Sir Douglas Haig issued an Order of the Day, in which he appealed to his men to endure to the last. "There is no other course open to us than to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man; there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end." Not less solemn was Sir Arthur Currie's charge to the Canadian Corps before they entered the battle. "Under the orders of your devoted officers in the coming battle you will advance or fall where you stand, facing the enemy. To those who fall I say, 'You will not die, but will step into immortality. Your mothers will not lament your fate, but will be proud to have borne such sons. Your names will be revered for ever and ever by your grateful country, and God will take you unto Himself.'" It is a charge which has the noble eloquence of Cromwell or Lincoln.

Within a week it seemed as if the enemy had succeeded. On the evening of 15th April the Germans entered Bailleul, and the next day we withdrew from the ground won in the Third Battle of Ypres to a position a mile east of that town. By the 17th the enemy was in both Meteren and Wytschaete, and this meant that the northern pillar of our defence had gone. The next step for the Germans was to seize Mont Kemmel, the highest ground between them and the Channel, and a position which would presently give them Hazebrouck.

The 17th and 18th of April were perhaps the most critical days of the whole battle. The enemy had reached his greatest strength, and the British troops were not yet reinforced at any point within sight of security. On the 17th the Germans had failed in an attack on the Belgians north of Ypres, and next day they failed no less conclusively in a movement on Béthune. This gave us a breathing space, and by the morning of Sunday, the 21st, French troops had taken over the defence of Mont Kemmel, and we had been able to relieve some of the divisions which had suffered most heavily.

That day saw the end of the main crisis of the battle. Mont Kemmel was lost and regained more than once, but the enemy was quickly becoming exhausted, and his gains, even when he made them, had no longer any strategic value. By the end of April he had employed in that one area of the line thirty-five fresh divisions, and nine which had been already in action. These troops were the cream of his army, and could not be replaced. Moreover, an odd feature had appeared in the last stages of the Lys battle. In March the enemy had succeeded

in piercing and dislocating the British front by a new tactical method applied with masterly boldness and precision, the method which has been described as "infiltration."[#] But as the Lys battle dragged on the Germans seemed to have forgotten these new tactics, and to have fallen back upon their old methods of mass and shock. The reason was that the new tactics could only be used with specially trained troops, and with fresh troops; they put too great a strain on weary divisions and raw levies; therefore, as the enemy's losses grew, his tactics would deteriorate in the same proportion.

[#] See p. 36.

If we take 5th May as marking the close of the Battle of the Lys, we may pause to reflect upon the marvels of the forty-five preceding days, since the enemy torrent first broke west of St. Quentin. More history had been crowded into their span than into many a year of campaigning. They had seen the great German thrust for Amiens checked in the very moment of success. They had seen the last bold push for the Channel Ports held up for days by weak divisions which bent but did not break, and finally die away with its purpose still far from achievement. In those forty-five days divisions and brigades had been more than once destroyed as units, and always their sacrifice had been the salvation of the British front. The survivors had behind them such a record of fruitful service as the whole history of the war could scarcely parallel.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE.

The First Battle of the Marne meant the frustration of Germany's main battle purpose, and the disappearance for ever of her hope of a complete and decisive victory. The Second Battle of the Marne in July 1918 was the beginning of Germany's defeat. In both battles the armies of Britain contributed to victory, but in both battles, as was right and proper, the main work was done by the French, and with them lies the chief glory.

In March Haig had been forced back to the gate of Amiens, and Foch, at last

appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the Allies, had for nearly a month looked into the eyes of defeat. But slowly the tide ebbed. Foch was able not only to repel the German assaults but to nurse and strengthen his own reserves. In spite of the desperate crises on the Lys and the Aisne midsummer found him rapidly growing in strength. And as the Allies grew, so the enemy declined.

[image]

MARSHAL FOCH.

For the first time Foch had the advantage of numbers, and by June there were more than half a million Americans in France. Moreover, he had devised an answer to the German tactics, and in his new light tanks he had a weapon which would give him the advantage of surprise. But like a great and wary commander, he waited till the enemy had struck yet again, so that he might catch him on the rebound. Germany still maintained her confidence. Her press announced that unless the American army could swim or fly it would never arrive in Europe—that at the best the men of the United States were like the soldiers of a child's game, made of paper cuttings. The battle staged for July was to bring the Germans to Paris. One army was to strike east of Rheims and cut the railway from Paris to Nancy. Another was to press across the Marne. When Foch had hurried all his forces to the danger points a third army would break through at Amiens and descend on the capital from the north. Then the British would be finally cut off from the French, the French would be broken in two, and victory, complete and indubitable, would follow.

The enemy was so confident that he made no secret of his plans, and from deserters and prisoners Foch learned the main details long before the assault was launched. The French general resolved to play a bold game. He borrowed a British corps from Haig, and he thinned the Amiens section so that it was dangerously weak. His aim was to entice the enemy south of the Marne, and then in the moment of his weakness to strike at his undefended flank.

At midnight on Sunday, 14th July, Paris was awakened by the sound of great guns, and knew that the battle had begun. At 4 a.m. on the 15th the Germans crossed their parapets. The thrust beyond the Marne was at once successful, for it was no part of Foch's plan to resist too doggedly at the apex of the salient. On a front of 22 miles the Germans advanced nearly three. But the attack east of Rheims was an utter failure. Gouraud's counter-bombardment dislocated the attack before it began, and with trifling losses to himself he held the advance in his battle zone, not losing a single gun. In the west the Americans stood firm,

so that the enemy salient could not be widened. These were the troops which, according to the German belief, could not land in Europe unless they became fishes or birds. The inconceivable had been brought to pass—"Birnam Wood had come to Dunsinane."

In two days the German advance had reached its limit—a long narrow salient south of the Marne, representing a progress at the most of 6 miles from the old battle-front. The time had now come for Foch's counterstroke. He had resolved to thrust with all his available reserves against the weak enemy flank from Soissons southward. There, in the shelter of the woods of Villers-Cotterets, lay the army of Mangin, who first won fame at Verdun.

The morning of the 18th dawned after a night of thunderstorms and furious winds. There was no gunfire on the French side, but at 4.30, out from the shelter of the woods came a great fleet of French light tanks, and behind them on a front of 35 miles the French and American infantry crossed the parapets. Before the puzzled enemy could realize his danger they were through his first defences.

The advance of the 18th was like a great bound forward. The chief work was done by Mangin's left wing, which at half-past 10 in the morning held the crown of the Montagne de Paris, on the edge of Soissons. All down the line the Allies succeeded. Sixteen thousand prisoners fell to them and some 50 guns, and at one point Mangin had advanced as much as 8 miles. Foch had narrowed the German salient, crumpled its western flank, and destroyed its communications. He had wrested the initiative from the Germans and brought their last offensive to a dismal close.

He had done more, though at the time no eye could pierce the future and read the full implications of his victory. Moments of high crisis slip past unnoticed. It is only the historian in later years who can point to a half-hour in a crowded day and say that then was decided the fate of a cause or a people. As the wounded trickled back through the tossing woods of Villers-Cotterets, spectators noted a strange exaltation in their faces. When the news reached Paris the city breathed a relief which was scarcely justified with the enemy still so strongly posted at her gates. But the instinct was right. The decisive blow had been struck. When the Allies breasted the Montagne de Paris that July morning they had, without knowing it, won the Second Battle of the Marne, and with it the war. Four months earlier Ludendorff had stood as the apparent dictator of Europe; four months later he and his master were fleeing to a foreign exile.

[image]

The Second Battle of the Marne.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

The attack on the German flank on the morning of 18th July had put an end to the enemy's hope of an advance on Paris, and had forced him to assume the defensive. But in this he still persevered. His plan now was to defend the line of the Aisne, in the hope that the French would break their teeth on it, and that the battle would then decline into a fruitless struggle for a few miles of trench, like the other actions of the long siege warfare. He hoped in vain. Foch had no mind to waste a single hour in operations which were not vital. As early as 23rd July the Allies' great scheme for the autumn battles was framed, and on Thursday, 8th August, Sir Douglas Haig opened the attack.

Foch's plan was to give the enemy no rest. He was like a swordsman who avoids his antagonist's sledge-hammer blows, who with lithe blade pinks him again and again and draws much blood, who baffles and confuses him, till the crushing weight of his opponent has been worn down by his own trained and elastic strength. It was his business to wear down the enemy continuously and methodically by a series of attacks on limited fronts, aiming at strictly limited objectives, and to keep him ceaselessly harassed over the whole battle-ground. The campaign had developed like a masterly game of chess. From 21st March to 18th July Foch had stood patiently on the defensive. From 18th July to 8th August he had won back his freedom of action, cleared his main communications, and hopelessly dislocated the German plan. From 8th August to 26th September it was his task to crumble the enemy's front, destroy the last remnant of his reserves, force him beyond all his prepared defences, and make ready for the final battle which would give victory.

On 8th August Haig's striking force was the British Fourth Army, under Sir Henry Rawlinson, and part of the French First Army, under General Debeney. The front of attack was east of Amiens, astride the valleys of the Avre, the Luce, and the Somme. Haig's immediate aim was to free his communications—that is, to push the enemy out of range of the main railways behind his front—as the French had done on the Marne, and to this end the enemy must be driven out of range of Amiens.

The preparations for the attack were most cunningly concealed, and infinite pains were taken to make the surprise complete. By an elaborate piece of "camouflage" the enemy was induced to believe that an attack in Flanders was preparing. The Canadians, who, along with the Australians, were the principal British attacking troops, had been secretly brought down from the north a few

days before, and only came into line just before the battle. For the action Sir Douglas Haig had accumulated not less than 400 Tanks, many of the light "whippet" type and most of the newest pattern. He was to employ Foch's tactics in their purest form. There was to be no artillery bombardment except just at the moment of advance; the ground had been perfectly reconnoitred from the air; the objectives to be secured were ambitious but strictly defined; and the troops to be used were among the *corps d'élite* of the army.

In the first week of August much rain fell, and on the night of the 7th a heavy mist hung over the ground. Just before daybreak on Thursday the 8th an intense bombardment was opened, so intense that the enemy's defences disappeared as if wiped out by a sponge. Four minutes later the bombardment stopped, and the Tanks and infantry moved forward. Rawlinson advanced at 4.20 a.m.; Debeney some twenty minutes later.

Success was immediate and continuous. The Canadians and Australians, pressing along the two great Roman highways to St. Quentin and Roye, marched steadily towards their final objectives, and these they reached long before noon. The enemy was completely surprised. At one place the Tanks captured an entire regimental mess at breakfast. At another the whole staff of a division was seized. In some villages the Germans were taken in their billets before they knew what had happened, and parties of the enemy were actually made prisoners while working in the harvest field. The Canadian cavalry passed through the infantry and captured a train on the railway line near Chaulnes. Indeed, that day the whole British cavalry performed miracles, advancing 23 miles from their point of concentration.

[image]

Map showing the ground regained and the New Front reached in the
First Stages of the last Allied Offensive.

This success at the beginning of the last battle of the war was due partly to the brilliant tactical surprise, partly to the high efficiency of the new Tanks, and also in some degree to the evident deterioration in the quality of the German infantry in that part of the front. The enemy machine-gunners did not display their old tenacity. The Allied casualties were extraordinarily small, one Canadian division, which was in the heart of the battle, losing only 100 men. It was very clear that the fortitude of the German line was ebbing, and this more than any other fact disturbed the minds of its commanders. Ludendorff has recorded in his

Memoirs that after the battle of 8th August he realized that Germany was beaten.

The Tanks played a brilliant and dramatic part in the day's success. One Tank captured a village single-handed, and its wary commander solemnly demanded a receipt for the village before he handed it over to the Australians. But the chief performance of the day was that of the "whippet" Tank "Musical Box," commanded by Lieutenant C. B. Arnold, and carrying as crew Gunner Ribbans and Driver Carney. This Tank started off at 4.20 a.m. in company with the others, and when she had advanced the better part of 2 miles discovered herself to be the leading machine, all the others having been ditched. She came under direct shell-fire from a German field battery, and turned off to the left, ran diagonally across the front of the battery at a distance of 600 yards, and fired at it with both her guns. The battery replied with eight rounds, fortunately all misses, and the Tank now managed to get to the battery's rear under cover of a belt of trees. The gunners attempted to get away, but "Musical Box" accounted for them all.

If a Tank can be said to go mad, this Tank now performed that feat. She started off due east straight for Germany, shooting down Germans whenever she saw them. The Australian infantry were following her, and for some time she was also in touch with two British cavalry patrols. Seeing a party of the enemy in a field of corn, she charged down upon them, killing three or four. She found a patrol of our cavalry dismounted and in trouble with some Germans on a railway bridge, so she made for the bridge and dispersed the Germans. She moved still farther east, and approached a small valley marked on Lieutenant Arnold's map as containing German hutments. As she entered the valley the Germans were seen packing their kits and beginning to move, and "Musical Box" opened fire. There was a general flight, but this did not prevent her guns from accounting for a considerable number. She now turned a little to the left across open country, firing at retreating German infantry at ranges of from 200 to 600 yards, and being heavily fired on by rifles and machine-guns in reply. Unfortunately she was carrying petrol tins on her roof, and these were perforated by the hail of bullets, so that the petrol ran all over the cab. The great heat from her engines and guns, which had been in action for nine or ten hours, made it necessary at this point for the crew to breathe through their box-respirators.

It was now about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and "Musical Box" was still moving east, shooting at anything she could see, from motor transport to marching infantry, and getting heavily peppered in return. At last Lieutenant Arnold was compelled to withdraw the forward gun. The fumes and the heat were stifling, but the crew managed to endure it till suddenly the gallant "Musical Box" was struck by two heavy shells following close one upon the other, and the cab burst into flames. Carney and Ribbans reached the door and collapsed. Lieutenant Arnold was almost overcome, but managed to get the door open and fall

out upon the ground. He was then able to drag out the other two men. Burning petrol was running on to the ground where they were lying, and the clothing of all three was on fire. They struggled to get away from the petrol, and while doing so Carney received his death wound. The enemy were now approaching from all quarters, and, having been thoroughly scared, they not unnaturally treated the two survivors somewhat roughly.

Lieutenant Arnold and Gunner Ribbans, badly burned, incredibly dirty, half-suffocated, and fainting with fatigue, were led off into captivity, after having completed such an Odyssey of devastation as perhaps befell no other two men in the war.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AUSTRALIANS AT MONT ST. QUENTIN.

Close to the spot where the South Africans made their great stand in the retreat of March 1918, it fell to the lot of troops from another of our Dominions to perform an almost miraculous exploit in the advance eastward to victory. By 30th August, as we have seen, the tide had fully turned. All the British armies were pressing back the enemy over the old Somme battlefield, and that enemy was struggling desperately to hold on to key positions long enough to enable him to retire in good order to the Hindenburg Line, where he hoped to stand on the defence over the winter. But these key positions were now being rushed too fast to permit of an orderly retreat, and so the Hindenburg defences proved of no avail, and before the end of October the Germans were a defeated army.

Of all the key positions the strongest was that of Mont St. Quentin, which commanded the old town of Péronne on the north. Péronne, as readers of Sir Walter Scott will remember, was the scene of some of the adventures of Quentin Durward. It had fallen into British hands in March 1917, when the Germans first retired to the Hindenburg Line. It had been lost in the great enemy onslaught of the following March. It was a very strong place, defended on the south and west by the links of the marshy Somme, and on the north by the low ridge called Mont St. Quentin, which provided superb gun positions. The place was held by one of the best of the German Divisions brought up from the reserve, the 2nd Prussian Guards. Their orders were to maintain it at all costs, for unless Mont St. Quentin was held, Péronne would fall, and if Péronne fell it would be a very

battered remnant that would struggle back to the main Hindenburg Line.

Sir Henry Rawlinson, the commander of the British Fourth Army, believed that the fight for Péronne would be long and difficult, and he entrusted it to the Australian Corps, who were unsurpassed for their fighting quality by any army in the world. This corps now performed the impossible, and in a single day's fighting, and with few losses, swept the enemy from Mont St. Quentin, took Péronne, and shook the German II. Army to its foundations. Sir Henry Rawlinson has described their exploit as the finest single action in the war.

No man who once saw the Australians in action could ever forget them. In the famous landing at Gallipoli, in a dozen desperate fights in that peninsula, in the fight for Pozières during the First Battle of the Somme, at the Third Battle of Ypres, and in the action at Villers-Bretonneux just before the final advance, they had shown themselves incomparable in their fury of assault and in reckless personal valour. They had more than gallantry; they had a perfect discipline and a perfect coolness. As types of physical perfection they have probably not been matched since the time of the ancient Greeks—these long, lean men, with their slow, quiet voices, and often the shadows of great fatigue around the deep-set, far-sighted eyes.

Their first task was to cross the Somme—no easy task, since Mont St. Quentin commanded every reach of it. Sir John Monash, the Australian commander, decided not to attempt to force the river south of the town; but in the darkness of night a brigade of the 2nd Australian Division managed to cross and seize the German trenches at Cléry. This placed two of the three Australian Divisions of attack on the east of the river, directly under the ridge of St. Quentin. General Rawlinson visited the Australian headquarters that evening, and whetted their keenness by frankly expressing his disbelief in their success on the morrow. "You think you are going to take Mont St. Quentin with three battalions! What presumption! However, I don't think I ought to stop you. Go ahead and try."

Very early on the morning of 31st August the Australian 2nd Division lay just under the ridge, with the 3rd Division on its left, and on its right the 5th Division south of the Somme. The plan was that the 2nd Division should take Mont St. Quentin, while the 3rd Division completed the capture of the high ground towards Bouchavesnes on the north, and the 5th Division passed troops across the river for the assault on Péronne. There were no Tanks to assist the infantry, and very few heavy guns, for the men had marched far ahead of the artillery.

At 5 a.m. on the 31st, while the morning was still quite dark, the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division opened the attack. It advanced straight up the hill with the bayonet, and at 8 a.m. Sir John Monash was able to report to General Rawlinson that his men had obtained a footing on Mont St. Quentin. All day the heroic brigade beat off desperate counter-attacks, and by nightfall it still maintained its

position.

Meantime the 14th Brigade from the 5th Division crossed the Somme, and passed through the 2nd Division area for the assault on Péronne, for Monash had determined that the right course was to take the defences of the town by a rush while they were still being organized by the enemy. The 14th Brigade had a march of 7 miles before it could be in position to deploy for the attack. It was ten hours on the road, and reached its jumping-off ground in the darkness of the night. There it had on its left the 6th Brigade of the 2nd Division, whose business was to complete the capture of Mont St. Quentin.

The final success came on 1st September. The 6th Brigade advanced well over the crest of Mont St. Quentin, and that fortress was now wholly in British hands. The 14th Brigade took Péronne. Ever since the attack of 8th August it had been the misfortune of that brigade to be the reserve unit of its Division, and therefore it had not shared in any serious fighting; but this day it made up for lost opportunities. "You see," said one company commander, "we had been trying to buy a fight off the other fellows for a matter of three weeks, and that day we got what we had been looking for, so we made the most of it."

Meantime the 3rd Division, on the left, completed the capture of the Bouchavesnes spur. By 3rd September the whole of the Péronne area was in British hands, and the enemy was in headlong retreat. It was clear that he could find no resting-place short of the main Hindenburg Line, and a month later Sir Douglas Haig proved that not even in that position was there an abiding sanctuary.

The actual capture of Mont St. Quentin was achieved by two brigades. It was a straightforward fight with the bayonet—the cream of the British Army against the cream of the enemy. For so resounding a success it was singularly economical of human life; on the hill itself nearly 2,000 prisoners were taken at the expense of some 200 Australian casualties.

CHAPTER XV.
THE LAST BATTLE.

By the 25th of September the German armies were back on the great line devised by Hindenburg in the autumn of 1916. The one chance left to them was to hold out there during the winter, in the hope that they might be able to bargain

with the Allies. If the Allies attacked, there were two sections which Ludendorff viewed with anxiety. One was his left wing on the Meuse, where, if the Allies broke through, the Hindenburg Line would be turned on its flank. The other was the German centre from Douai to St. Quentin, the main Hindenburg Line, which was not only the fortress where he hoped to pass the winter, but the one protection of the great railway from Lille by Valenciennes to Mezières, on which his whole position depended. He therefore laboured to keep his left and centre as strong as possible; for, in spite of his experience in August and September, he could not conceive the possibility of an assault on every section.

For Foch this was to be the crowning battle of the war. If he could break through the German centre, and at the same time turn the German left, defeat would stare the enemy in the face, and there would be victory long before Christmas. If the Americans on the Meuse succeeded, they would make retreat imperative; but if Haig in the centre succeeded, he would make retreat impossible, and disaster must follow. The British were assigned the most difficult part. They had to attack in the area where the enemy defences were most highly organized and his forces strongest. If the Hindenburg Line held, the German courage might yet recover, and a new era of resistance begin. Haig's armies had already borne the heaviest share of the summer fighting, and every division had been sorely tried. Yet the attempt must be made, for it was the essential part of the whole strategy, and the measure of difficulty was the measure of the honour in which Foch held the fighting qualities of his British allies.

In deciding to make the attack, and to break the Hindenburg Line at one blow, Sir Douglas Haig stood alone. So difficult seemed the operation that the British Government were in the gravest doubts, and left the burden of responsibility upon the Commander-in-Chief. Even the French generals hesitated. The movement was undertaken on Sir Douglas Haig's initiative; he bore the whole burden of it; and therefore to him belongs the main credit of what was destined to be one of the decisive actions of the war.

Foch began on his right flank, and on 26th September the American army attacked on the Meuse. Next day, the 27th, Haig struck towards Cambrai. The two main defences of the Hindenburg Line were the Canal du Nord, and, behind it, the Scheldt Canal, the latter forming the outwork of the system. The principal German trenches were on the east bank; but on the west bank lay advanced posts, skilfully placed. In one section the canal passed through a tunnel 6,000 yards long, connected by shafts with the trenches above. In another part it lay in a deep cutting, the sides of which were honeycombed with dug-outs. The fortified zone was from 5 to 7 miles wide, and culminated on the east in what was known as the Beaurevoir Line, strongly wired double-trench lines of the same type as those on the western side.

On the 27th the Third Army under Byng, and the First Army under Horne, attacked on the left, crossed the Canal du Nord, and by the evening had reached the edge of the Scheldt Canal. Next day that canal had been partially crossed, and Cambrai was menaced from two sides. These events roused acute apprehension in the mind of the German Staff. The crossing of the Canal du Nord by Tanks on the backs of Tanks, and the passing of the Scheldt Canal at its northern end, had shaken their confidence in the outer Hindenburg defences. Next day, the 29th, came Haig's crowning blow. He struck at the strongest part, and it crumbled before him.

The attack was made by Rawlinson's Fourth Army. For two days his guns had not been silent; the enemy's garrisons were forced into tunnels and deep dug-outs, and the transport of food and ammunition was made all but impossible. The Germans were, therefore, in a state of confusion and fatigue when Haig attacked at 10 minutes to 6 on the morning of Sunday, the 29th.

This action was one of the greatest of the campaign, whether we regard the difficulties to be faced or the strategic value of the gains. Ludendorff was fighting for his last hope, and he had warned his men accordingly. One captured order reminded his troops that "Our present position is our winter position." Another ran: "There can be no question of going back a single step further. We must show the British, French, and Americans that any further attacks on the Hindenburg Line will be utterly broken, and that that Line is an impregnable rampart, with the result that the Entente Powers will condescend to consider the terms of peace which it is absolutely necessary for us to have before we can end the war." Germany was already busy with peace proposals, and she had nothing to bargain with except these defences in the West.

The key of the position was the angle of the Scheldt Canal where it bent east, with the village of Bellenglise in its bend, for if the canal were forced there the defences on either side would be turned. The work was entrusted to the 46th Division of North Midland Territorials, which had a long and brilliant record in the war. Theirs was an amazing performance. The canal before them was some 50 to 60 feet wide, the water in some parts being as much as 10 feet deep. and in others a mere trickle. It was a morning of thick fog when behind the tornado of the barrage the Midlanders, carrying life-belts and mats and rafts, advanced to the attack. Since parts of the canal were impassable, the crossing had to be made on a narrow front. Swimming or wading, and in some cases using foot-bridges which the enemy had left undestroyed, they passed the canal west and north of Bellenglise, swarmed up the farther bank, and took the German trenches beyond. Then, fanning out, they attacked in rear the positions to the south, capturing many batteries still in action. That day this one Division took over 4,000 prisoners and 70 guns.

It was the same everywhere else on the British front. The main Hindenburg defences had been breached, and all next day the Fourth Army pressed through the gap. The greatest battle of the war was now approaching its climax, and the whole 250 miles of front, from the Meuse to the sea, were ablaze. Ludendorff could not have withdrawn even if he had wished it. By 7th October Haig had broken through all the front Hindenburg Line, and was pressing upon the last defences. The time was therefore ripe for a great movement on the broadest possible front, which would destroy the whole zone. For, in the words of the official dispatch, "Nothing but the natural obstacles of a wooded and well-watered country lay between our armies and Maubeuge."

The great movement was begun by Haig early on Tuesday, 8th October. It was a wild, wet, autumn morning when Byng at 4.30 and Rawlinson at 5.10 attacked on a 17-mile front, while a French army extended the battle 4 miles farther south. The enemy resisted desperately, but nothing could stay the rush of the Allied infantry and the deadly penetration of their Tanks. By the evening Haig had advanced between 3 and 4 miles, and the Hindenburg zone was no more. The enemy was falling back to the Oise and the Selle, and for the moment his organization had been broken. Every road converging on Le Cateau was blocked with transport and troops, and our cavalry were galloping eastward to confuse the retreat.

Sir Douglas Haig's battle, which ended on the 10th October, may be considered the determining action in the campaign, and it has been described by Foch as "a classic example of military art." It had no defect either of plan or of execution. The enemy was fairly and clearly defeated in a field action. Foch had played on the whole front a crescendo of deadly music, and the enemy's strategic position was now so desperate that no local stand could save him. There was talk at the time of a German retreat to the Meuse. but it was an idle dream. Long before her broken divisions could reach that river Germany would be upon her knees.

PART III.

THE "SIDE SHOWS."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LANDING AT GALLIPOLI.

Early in 1915 it seemed to the British Government that, since there were no longer any flanks to be turned on the Western front, the lines in France and Flanders were settling down to a siege and a war of positions. They therefore looked elsewhere for some more promising area of battle, since, if the front door of a fortress is barred, there may be an entrance by a back door. The place which promised best was the narrow straits called the Dardanelles, which led from the Ægean into the Sea of Marmora, and so to Constantinople. There full use could be made of the British fleet. The capture of the Straits would involve the fall of the capital, and this might drive Turkey out of the war. Success there would bring over to our side the hesitating Balkan neutral states. It would open the road for Russia to import munitions of war, and to export her accumulated supplies of wheat. Lastly, Russia was being hard pressed, and had appealed to the Western Allies for aid, and her request could not be refused.

Accordingly, it was decided to make an attempt upon the Dardanelles. The first effort was made by ships alone. But the Turks had powerful forts on both sides of the straits which could not be destroyed by naval guns. It was clear that the Dardanelles could not be opened until the Gallipoli Peninsula on the north side was captured. Unfortunately, the naval attack had forewarned the enemy, and he had enormously strengthened his position on the Gallipoli heights.

The forces put at Sir Ian Hamilton's disposal for the enterprise were the 29th Division of regulars and Territorials, two divisions from Australia and New Zealand, the Royal Naval Division, and a French brigade. Of these troops only the 29th Division had had any experience in war. Sir Ian Hamilton decided that the only possible landing-places were the beaches at the south-west end of the Peninsula, and another beach at Gaba Tepe, some distance up the northern side. His aim was, by landing at the point, to fight his way to Krithia village, and carry the Achi Baba ridge, while the Australians from Gaba Tepe could turn the right wing of the Turkish defence. Once the Achi Baba heights were captured the Straits would be ours.

The day originally fixed for the attempt was 23rd April. But on the 20th a storm rose which for forty-eight hours lashed the Ægean. On the 23rd it abated, and that afternoon the first of the black transports began to move out of Mudros harbour. Next day the rest of the force followed, all in wild spirits for this venture into the unknown. They recalled to one spectator the Athenians departing for the Sicilian expedition, when the galleys out of sheer light-heartedness raced each other to Ægina.

The morning of Sunday, the 25th, was one of those which delight the trav-

eller in April in the Ægean. A light mist fills the air before dawn, but it disappears with the sun, and all day there are clear skies, still seas, and the fresh, invigorating warmth of spring. At the butt end of Gallipoli there are five little beaches, originally nameless, but now for all time to be known by the letters affixed to them on the war maps of the British Army. Beginning from the left, there is Beach Y, and, a little south of it, Beach X. Rounding Cape Tekke, we reach Beach W, where a narrow valley opens between the headlands of Tekke and Helles. Here there is a broad semicircular stretch of sand. South of Helles is Beach V, a place of the same configuration as Beach W, but unpleasantly commanded by the castle and village of Sedd-el-Bahr at its southern end. Lastly, inside the Straits, on the east side of Morto Bay, is Beach S, close to the point of Eski Hissarlik. The landing at Gaba Tepe, on the north side of the peninsula, was entrusted to the Australian and New Zealand troops; that at the Helles beaches to the 29th Division, with some units of the Naval Division. It was arranged that simultaneously the French should land on the Asiatic shore at Kum Kale, to prevent the Turkish batteries from being brought into action against our men at Beaches V and S.

Let us assume that an aeroplane enabled us to move up and down the shores of the peninsula and observe the progress of the different landings. About one in the morning the ships arrive at a point 5 miles from the Gallipoli shores. At 1.20 boats are lowered, and the troops line up on the decks. Then they embark in the flotillas, and steam pinnaces begin to tow them shorewards in the hazy half-light before dawn. The Australians destined for Gaba Tepe are carried in destroyers which take them close in to the shore.

The operations are timed so that the troops reach the beaches at daybreak. Slowly and very quietly the boats and destroyers steal towards the land. A little before 5 an enemy's searchlight flares out. The boats are now in shallow water under the Gaba Tepe cliffs, and the men are leaping ashore. Then comes a blaze of rifle-fire from the Turkish trenches on the beach, and the men who have landed charge them with the bayonet. The whole cliff seems to leap into light, for everywhere trenches and caverns have been dug in the slopes. The fire falls most heavily on the men still in the boats, who have the difficult task of waiting as the slow minutes bring them shoreward.

The Australians do not linger. They carry the lines on the beach with cold steel, and find themselves looking up at a steep cliff a hundred feet high. In open order they dive into the scrub, and scramble up the loose yellow rocks. By a fortunate accident their landing is farther north than was intended, just under the cliffs of Sari Bair. At Gaba Tepe the long slope would have given the enemy a great advantage in defence; but here there is only the 40-foot beach and then the cliffs. He who knows the Ægean in April will remember those fringed sea walls and bare brown slopes. From a distance they look as arid as the

Syrian desert, but when the traveller draws near he finds a paradise of curious and beautiful flowers—anemone, grape hyacinth, rock rose, asphodel, and amaryllis. Up this rock garden the Australians race, among the purple cistus and the matted creepers and the thickets of myrtle. They have left their packs at the foot, and scale the bluffs like chamois. It is an achievement to rank with Wolfe's escalade of the Heights of Abraham. Presently they are at the top, and come under the main Turkish fire. But the ground gives good cover, and they set about entrenching the crest of the cliffs to cover the boats' landing. This is the position at Sari Bair at 7 a.m.

As we journey down the coast we come next to Beach Y. There at 7 a.m. all is going well. The 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Plymouth battalion of the Naval Division, landing at a place which the enemy thought wholly impracticable, have without difficulty reached the top of the cliffs. At Beach X things are even better. The *Swiftsure* has plastered the high ground with shells, and the landing ship, the *Implacable*, has anchored close to the shore in six fathoms of water. With scarcely a casualty the 2nd Royal Fusiliers have gained the cliff line.

[image]

The Landing Beaches at Gallipoli.

There has been a harder fight at Beach W, between Tekke and Helles, where the sands are broader. The shore has been trenched throughout, and wired and mined almost to the water's edge, and in the scrub behind are hidden the Turkish snipers. Though our ships have bombarded the shore for three-quarters of an hour, they cannot clear out the enemy, and do not seem to have made much impression on the wire entanglements. The first troops have landed to the right under the cliffs of Cape Helles, and have reached the top, while a party on the left has scaled Cape Tekke. But the men of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers who landed on the shore itself have had a fiery trial. They suffered heavily while still on the water, and on landing came up against unbroken lines of wire, while snipers and concealed machine-guns rained death on them. Here we have had heavy losses, and at 7 a.m. the landing has not yet succeeded.

The case is more desperate still at Beach V, under Sedd-el-Bahr. Here, as at Beach W, there are a stretch of sand, a scrubby valley, and flanking cliffs. It is the strongest of the Turkish positions, and troops landing in boats are exposed to every type of converging fire. A curious expedient has been tried. A collier, the *River Clyde*, with 2,000 men of the 2nd Hampshires, 1st Dublin Fusiliers, and

1st Munster Fusiliers on board, and eight boat-loads towed by steam pinnaces, approached close to the shore. The boat-loads—the rest of the Dublin Fusiliers—suffered horribly, for when they dashed through the shallows to the beach they were pinned to the ground by fire. Three lines of wire entanglements had to be forced, and a network of trenches. A bank of sand, 5 or 6 feet high, runs at the back, and under its cover the survivors have taken shelter. In the steel side of the ship doors have been cut, which open and disgorge men into the lighters alongside, like some new Horse of Troy. But a tornado of shot and shell rained on her, and of the gallant men who leaped from the lighters to the reef and from the reef to the sea, very few reached the land. Those who did have joined their fellows lying flat under the sand-bank on that beach of death. At Beach S, in Morto Bay, all has gone well. Seven hundred men of the 2nd South Wales Borderers have been landed from trawlers, and have established themselves on the cliff tops at the place called De Totts Battery.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LANDING AT GALLIPOLI (*continued*).

Let us go back to Sari Bair and look at the position at noonday. We are prospering there, for more than 10,000 men are now ashore, and the work of disembarking guns and stores goes on steadily, though the fire from inland is still deadly. We see a proof of it in a boat full of dead men which rocks idly in the surf. The great warships from the sea send their heavy shells against the Turkish lines, sea-planes are "spotting" for them, and wireless stations are being erected on the beach. Firing from the ships is not easy, for the morning sun shines right in the eyes of the gunners. The Royal Engineers are making roads up the cliff, and supplies are climbing steadily to our firing line. On the turf of the cliff top our men are entrenched, and are working their way forward.

Unfortunately the zeal of the Australians has outrun their discretion, and some of them have pushed on too far. They have crossed three ridges, and have got to a fourth ridge within sight of the Straits. In that broken country such an advance is certain death, and the rash attack has been checked with heavy losses. The wounded are being brought in, and it is no light task getting them down the cliffs on stretchers, and across the beach and the bullet-splashed sea to the warships. Remember that we are holding a position which is terribly conspicuous

to the enemy, and all our ammunition and water and food have to be dragged up these breakneck cliffs. Still, the first round has been won, Indian troops are being landed in support, and we are firmly placed at Sari Bair.

As we move down the coast we find that all goes well at Beach X, and that the troops there are working their way forward, but that at Beach Y the Scottish Borderers are being heavily counter-attacked and are making little progress. The *Implacable* has knocked out of action a Turkish battery at Krithia which gave much annoyance to our men at Beach X. At Beach W we have improved our position. We have cleared the beach and driven the Turks out of the scrub at the valley foot, and the work of disembarking men and stores is proceeding. Our right wing—the 4th Worcesters—is working round by the cliffs above Cape Helles to enfilade the enemy who are holding Beach V, where our men are still in deadly jeopardy.

The scene at Beach V is strange and terrible. From the deep water the *Cornwallis* and the *Albion* are bombarding the enemy at Sedd-el-Bahr, and the 15-inch shells from the *Queen Elizabeth* are screaming overhead. The Trojan Horse is still lying bow on against the reefs, with her men unable to move, and the Turkish howitzers playing on her. If a man shows his head he is picked off by sharpshooters. The troops we have landed lie flat on the beach under cover of the sand ridge, unable to advance or retreat, and under a steady tornado of fire. At Beach S things are satisfactory.

Meantime the French landing at Kum Kale has achieved its purpose. Originally timed for 6 a.m., it did not take place till 9.30. They had a skirmish with the Turks, partly on the height at Kum Kale, and partly on the Trojan plain. Then they advanced along the swell of ground near the coast as far as Yeni Shehr. Next evening they re-embarked and joined our right wing at Beach S. They took 500 prisoners, and could have taken more had there been room for them in the boats. The Turk, who showed himself a dauntless fighter, surrendered with great good-humour when the game was up. He had no crusading zeal in the business.

As darkness fell on that loud Sabbath, the minds of the Allied Staff may well have been anxious. We had gained a footing, but no more, and it was but a precarious lodgment. The complexity and strength of the enemy's defence far surpassed our expectation. He had tunnelled the cliffs, and created a wonderful and intricate trench system, which took full advantage of the natural strength of the ground. The fire from our leviathans on the deep was no more effective against his entrenched positions than it had been against the forts of the Straits.

Let us resume our tour of the beaches about 10 o'clock on the morning of the 26th. At Sari Bair the Australians are facing a counter-attack. It lasts for two hours, and is met by a great bombardment from our ships. The end comes when, about noon, the Australians and New Zealanders advance with the

bayonet, and drive back the enemy. But all that day there is no rest for our troops, who are perfecting their trenches under a deluge of shrapnel. Their flanks are indifferently secured, and they have but the one landing-place behind them, from which their front line is scarcely 1,000 yards distant. They are still clinging precariously to the coast scarp.

At Beach Y things have gone badly. Our men there had advanced during the Sunday afternoon, and had been outflanked and driven back to the cliff edge. The Scottish Borderers lost their commanding officer and more than half their men. It was decided to re-embark and move the troops to Beach X, and as we pass the retreat is going on successfully under cover of the ship's fire. At Beach X there has been a hard struggle. Last night we were strongly attacked there, and driven to the very edge of the cliffs, where we hung on in rough shelter trenches. This morning we are advancing again, and making some way.

At Beach W, too, there has been a counter-attack. Yesterday afternoon our right wing there, which tried to relieve the position on Beach V by an enfilading attack on the enemy, got among wire, and was driven back. During the night the Turks came on in force, and we were compelled to fling our beach parties into the firing line, bluejackets and sappers armed with whatever weapons they could find. This morning the situation is easier, we have landed more troops, and are preparing to move forward.

At Beach V the landing is still in its first stage. Men are still sheltering on the deadly beach behind the sandbank. We have gained some positions among the ruins which were once Sedd-el-Bahr, but not enough to allow us to proceed. Even as we look a final effort is beginning, in which the Dublin Fusiliers and the Munster Fusiliers distinguish themselves, though it is hard to select any for special praise among the splendid battalions of the 29th Division. It continues all morning, most gallantly directed till he fell by Lieutenant-Colonel Doughty-Wylie of the Headquarters Staff, and about 2 p.m. it is successful. The main Turkish trenches are carried, the debris of the castle and village are cleared, and the enemy is in retreat. The landing can now go forward, and the men, who for thirty-two hours have been huddled behind the sandbank, enduring torments of thirst and a nerve-racking fire, can move their cramped limbs and join their comrades.

By the morning of Tuesday, the 27th, all the beaches—except Beach Y, which had been relinquished—were in working order, and the advance could proceed. Next morning it began, and by the evening of the 28th we had securely won the butt of the peninsula, and our front ran from 3 miles north-west of Cape Tekke to a mile north of Eski Hissarlik.

So ended the opening stage of the Gallipoli campaign—the Battle of the Landing. It was a fight without a precedent. There had been landings—such

as Abercromby's at Aboukir and Wolfe's at the cove west of Louisburg—fiercely contested landings, in our history, but none on a scale like this. Sixty thousand men, backed by the most powerful navy in the world, attacked a shore which nature seemed to have made impregnable, and which was held by not inferior numbers of the enemy, in positions prepared for months, and supported by the latest modern artillery. The mere problem of transport was sufficient to deter the boldest. Every rule of war was set at nought. On paper the thing was impossible, as the Turkish army orders announced. According to the text-books no man should have left the beaches alive. We were fighting against a gallant enemy who was at his best in defence and in this unorthodox type of battle. That our audacity succeeded was due to the unsurpassable fighting quality of our men—the Regulars and Territorials of the 29th Division, the Naval Division, and not least to the dash and doggedness of the Australasian corps. The Gallipoli campaign was to end in failure, but, whatever be our judgment on its policy or its consequences, the Battle of the Landing must be acclaimed as a marvellous, an unparalleled feat of arms.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEPARTURE FROM GALLIPOLI.

By September 1915 it was clear that the Gallipoli expedition could not succeed. All summer the hopeless struggle had continued for the heights of the peninsula. In July reinforcements arrived, and in August these new divisions, together with the Anzacs,[#] made an attack, that of the left wing at Suvla Bay being designed to turn the enemy flank. This supreme effort failed. There was no chance of further reserves, for the entry of Bulgaria into the war meant that the Allies must send troops to Salonika to help Serbia if possible, and in any case to protect the northern frontier of Greece. Only one course was possible—to get off the peninsula as best we could.

[#] So called from the initial letters of the first Australasian Corps—"Australian and New Zealand Army Corps."

After much discussion it was decided to evacuate the positions at Suvla and Anzac, and to retain those at Cape Helles. Nearly everybody concerned in the matter assumed that this would entail a heavy loss. Many estimated it at 15 per cent., and the most hopeful were prepared for the loss of at least one division. An embarkation in the face of the enemy had always meant a stiff rearguard fight and many casualties.

On the 8th December Sir Charles Monro, who was then in command of the British troops in the Ægean, issued orders for evacuation. The difficulties were enormous. It was a question of embarking not a division or two, but three army corps; it was impossible to move them all at once with the available transports; there must be a gap between the operations, and this meant that the enemy would probably be forewarned of the later movements. Moreover, a lengthy embarkation put us terribly at the mercy of the winter weather. Even a mild wind from the south or south-west raised a swell that made communication with the beaches precarious.

The plan was to move the war material, including the heavy guns, by instalments during a period of ten days, working only at night. A large portion of the troops would also be got off during these days, certain picked battalions being left to the last. Everything was to be kept normal during the daylight, and every morning before daybreak the results of the night's work must be hidden. Success depended upon two things mainly—fine weather and secrecy.

From the 8th December onward the troops, night after night, watched the shrinkage of their numbers. There was a generous rivalry as to who should stay till the last—a proof of spirit, when we remember that every man believed that the rearguard was doomed to death or capture. Soon only those in the prime of health and strength were left; all the weak and sickly had gone aboard the transports, which nightly stole in and out of the moonlit bays. Soon the heavy batteries had gone. Then the field guns began to disappear, leaving only enough to keep up the daily pretence of bombardment. It was an eerie business for the last battalions as they heard their protecting guns rumbling shoreward in the darkness. Then the horses and motor-cars were also shipped, and by Friday, the 17th December, very few guns were left. To the Turkish observers the piles of boxes on the beaches looked as if fresh supplies had been landed and we were preparing to hold the place indefinitely.

The weather was warm and clement, with light moist winds and a low-hanging screen of cloud. Coming in the midst of an Ægean winter it seemed to our men a direct interposition of Providence. It was like the land beyond the North Wind, which Elizabethan mariners believed in, where he who pierced the outer crust of the Polar snows found a country of roses and eternal summer. No fisherman ever studied the weather signs more anxiously than did the British

commanders during these days. Hearts sank when the wind looked like moving to the west. But the weather held, and when the days fixed for the final embarkation arrived, the wind was still favourable, skies were clear, and the moon was approaching its full. Nature had joined the daring conspiracy.

On Saturday, the 18th December, only a few picked battalions held the Suvla front. The final embarkation had been fixed for the two succeeding nights. The evening fell in a perfect calm. The sea was still as a mill-pond, and scarcely a breath of wind blew in the sky. Moreover, a light blue mist clothed all the plain of Suvla, and a haze shrouded the moon. At 6 p.m. the crews of the warships went to action stations, and in the darkness the transports stole into the bay. Not a shot was fired. In dead quiet, showing no lights, the transports moved in and out. Every unit found its proper place. By 1 a.m. on the morning of Sunday, the 19th, the bay lay empty in the moonlight.

That Sunday was one of the most curious in the war. Our lines looked exactly as they had done during the past four months. We kept up our usual fire and received the Turkish answer, but had any body of the enemy chosen to attack they would have found the trenches held by a mere handful. There were 20,000 Turks on the Suvla and Anzac fronts, and 60,000 in immediate reserve. Had they known it, they had before them the grand opportunity of the campaign. Night again fell with the same halcyon weather. The transports—destroyers, trawlers, picket boats, every kind of craft—slipped once again into the bay, and before midnight the last guns had been got on board. By 3.30 a.m. the last of the troops were on the beach, and long before the dawn broke all were aboard. One man had been hit in the thigh by a bullet, but that was the only casualty.

[image]

Evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The operations at Anzac were conducted on the same lines. The beaches at Suvla were 5 miles from the enemy and open to observation; at Anzac, in places they were less than 2 miles distant, but were concealed from view under the steep seaward bluffs. Some of our gun positions there were on dizzy heights, down which a gun could only be brought part by part. The work was brilliantly performed. On the Saturday night three-fifths of the entire force were got on board the transports. On Sunday night the rest were embarked, with two men wounded as the total casualties. By 5.30 a.m. on Monday morning the last transports moved away from the coast, leaving the warships to follow.

Then on the 12 miles of beach, from Suvla Burnu to Gaba Tepe, there was

seen one of the strangest spectacles of the campaign. The useless stores left behind had been piled in great heaps on the shores and drenched with petrol. Before the last men left parties of Royal Engineers set time fuses. About 4 a.m. on the Monday morning the fires were alight, blazing most fiercely near Suvla Point. As the beach fires flared up, the enemy, thinking some disaster had befallen us, shelled the place to prevent us extinguishing the flames. The warships shelled back, and all along that broken coast great pillars of fire flared to heaven like giant beacons in some strife of the Immortals. Up to 8 o'clock picket boats were still collecting stragglers; by 9 a.m. all was over, and the last warship steamed away from the coast which had been the grave of so many high hopes and so many gallant men.

We were just in time. That night the weather broke, and a furious gale blew from the south which would have made embarkation impossible. Rain fell in sheets and quenched the fires, and soon every trench at Suvla and Anzac was a torrent. Great seas washed away the landing stages. The puzzled enemy sat still and waited. He saw that we had gone, but he distrusted the evidence of his eyes. History does not tell what fate befell the first Turks who penetrated into our empty trenches, or what heel first tried conclusions with the hidden mines.

The success—the amazing success—of the Suvla and Anzac evacuation made the position at Cape Helles more difficult. No one believed that a similar performance would be possible there after the enemy had been so fully warned; but on the 27th December it was decided to evacuate Helles, and the work went on during the last days of the month and the first week of the new year. On Friday, January 7, 1916, there was a Turkish attack, which the few men remaining managed to repel. Next day, Saturday, the 8th, was calm and fine, and all was ready for the final effort.

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon the weather changed. A strong south-westerly wind blew up; by 11 p.m. it increased to a gale of 35 miles an hour. This storm covered our movements from the enemy, but it nearly made retirement impossible. On some beaches the piers were washed away and no troops could be embarked. Nevertheless by 3.30 the last men were on board.

All night the Turks gave no sign, but when the transports had moved off the stores left behind were fired simultaneously by time fuses. Red lights instantly burned along the enemy lines, and a bombardment began which continued till sunrise. The Turks proclaimed that the retreat had been attended with desperate losses and great captures of guns. The claim was an absurd falsehood. We blew up and left behind the ruins of seventeen old worn-out pieces. Our total casualties at Helles amounted to one man wounded.

To avoid the disastrous consequences of a defeat is, as a military operation, usually more difficult than to win a victory. There is less chance of the high spirit

of the attack, for such is the generosity of the human spirit that safety is less of an incentive to effort than the hope of victory. To embark so great an army secretly and without loss in mid-winter was an extraordinary achievement. It was made possible only by an almost miraculous series of favourable chances, and by the perfect organization and discipline of our men. We had failed at Gallipoli, but we had escaped the worst costs of failure. We had defeated the calculations of the enemy and upset every precedent.

Across the ribbon of the Dardanelles, on the green plain of Troy, the most famous war of the ancient world had been fought. The European shores had now become a no less classic ground of arms. If the banks of Scamander had seen men strive desperately with fate, so had the heights of Achi Baba and the loud beaches of Helles. Had the fashion continued of linking the gods with the strife of mankind, what strange myth might not have sprung from this rescue of the British troops in the teeth of winter gales and uncertain seas I It would have been rumoured, as of old at Troy, that Poseidon had done battle for his children.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM.

At the outset of the war the conquest of Egypt was an important aim of the Turkish Government and their German masters. But early in 1915 the Turkish invasion was scattered on the banks of the Suez Canal, and hopes of an easy victory were shattered. Nevertheless, the defence of Egypt remained an anxious problem for Britain. That country was the base both for Gallipoli and for Mesopotamia, and moreover, as Moltke pointed out long before, was the key of Britain's Eastern possessions. It was soon realized that Egypt could not be properly defended on the Canal, but only on the Palestine frontier, beyond the Sinai Desert.

During 1915 and 1916 Turkey and Germany projected many schemes for an Egyptian invasion, and the British generals in Egypt were no less busy. If the war was to be carried into Palestine railways and water pipes must be laid across the desert. Slowly the British front crept eastward. The Turks were defeated in various desert battles, and in the spring of 1917 the British army crossed the frontier of Palestine.

The British purpose had somewhat changed. The offensive had been sub-

stituted for the defensive. So far as possible it was desired to do in Palestine what Sir Stanley Maude was doing in Mesopotamia—to pin down large Turkish forces, and so alarm Turkey about the safety of certain key points in her territory that she would demand aid from Germany and thus confuse the plans of the German General Staff.

The land from the Wadi el Arish—the ancient "River of Egypt"—to the Philistian Plain had for 2,600 years been a cockpit of war. Sometimes a conqueror from the north or the south met the enemy in Egypt or in Syria, but more often the decisive fight was fought in the gates. Up and down the strip of seaward levels marched the great armies of Egypt and Assyria, while the Jews looked fearfully down from their barren hills. In the Philistian Plain Sennacherib smote the Egyptian hosts in the days of King Hezekiah, only to see his army melt away under the stroke of the "angel of the Lord." At Rafa Esarhaddon defeated Pharaoh, and added Egypt and Ethiopia to his kingdoms. At Megiddo, or Armageddon, Josiah was vanquished by Pharaoh Necho, who in turn was routed by Nebuchadnezzar. At Ascalon, during the Crusades, Godfrey of Bouillon defeated the Egyptians, and 150 years later that town fell to the Mameluke Sultan after the battle of Gaza. In this gate of ancient feuds it now fell to Turkey's lot to speak with her enemies.

But at first the British advance was checked. In March and April 1917 two battles were fought at Gaza—two frontal attacks which failed. During the summer Sir Edmund Allenby was appointed to the chief command, and slowly and patiently he perfected his plans. He saw that a direct attack on Gaza was likely to fail, but far to the east he observed a weak point in the enemy front where the town of Beersheba constituted a detached and separate defensive system. If Beersheba could be taken, the whole Gaza position could be turned on the flank.

Beersheba was duly taken at the end of October 1917, and on the 7th November Gaza followed. The enemy suffered severely, and was in full retreat, almost in flight. Sir Edmund Allenby's objective was now Jerusalem, and his problem was less one of manoeuvres than of supply. His troops would advance just as fast as water and food could be brought up behind them.

[image]

FIELD-MARSHAL SIR EDMUND ALLENBY (VISCOUNT ALLENBY OF MEGIDDO).

The advance was made in two main directions—one from Hebron due north towards Bethlehem; the other by the coastal plain, aiming at the junction where the Jerusalem railway joined the main line to Damascus. The Turkish army was

split into two parts, retreating in different directions. Though Enver came from Constantinople and Falkenhayn from Aleppo it was difficult for them to devise a defence. Allenby seized Jaffa, and then swung eastward into the Judæan highlands. Now the progress became slow, while squalid little villages, whose names are famous throughout the whole Christian world, fell to the British troops. On the 30th November the British line had the shape of a sickle, with the centre of the curve flung far forward towards Jerusalem, and it was necessary to bring up the handle, which consisted of the cavalry and infantry which were at Hebron. By the 7th these had taken Bethlehem, and by the 8th British troops were before Jerusalem on the south and west, and within a mile and a half of its walls.

The Turkish garrison did not await the attack. In the night preceding Sunday, the 9th December, the day of the festival of the Hanookah, which commemorates the recapture of the Temple by Judas Maccabæus, detachments of broken Turkish soldiers poured in at the western or Jaffa Gate, while an outgoing stream flowed eastward across the valley of Jehoshaphat. Early in the morning the enemy sent out a white flag of surrender, and before noon British patrols were in the city.

Two days later Sir Edmund Allenby entered by the Jaffa Gate. Close by was the breach made in the walls to admit the German Emperor when he made his foolish pilgrimage in 1898. Far different was the entry of the British general. It was a clear, bright day, and the streets and housetops were thronged with black-coated, tarbushed Syrians and Levantines, picturesquely-clad peasants from the near villages, and Arabs from the fringes of the desert. There was no display of bunting and no bell-ringing or firing of salutes. On foot, accompanied only by his Staff, the commanders of the French and Italian detachments, and the military attachés of France, Italy, and the United States, he was received by the newly appointed Military Governor of the city, and a guard representing all the nationalities engaged in the campaign. He turned to the right into the Mount Zion quarter, and at the Citadel, at the base of the ancient Tower of David, his proclamation was read to the people.

Then he quietly left the city. Yet no conqueror had ever entered it with more prestige. For centuries there had been current an Arab prophecy that a deliverer should come from the West, and in 1898 the people of Palestine had asked if the Kaiser was indeed the man. But the prophecy foretold that such would not be the manner of his coming, for the true saviour would bear the name of a Prophet of God, and would enter Jerusalem on foot, and that he would not appear till the Nile flowed into Palestine. To the peasants of Judæa the prophecy now seemed to be fulfilled, for the name of the English general was in Arabic "the Prophet,"

and his men had come into the land bringing with them the waters of Egypt.

CHAPTER XX.
ALLENBY'S GREAT DRIVE.

The capture of Jerusalem on December 9, 1917, left a curious military situation. The Turkish army was split into two parts, with its right wing north-east of Jaffa and its left to the north and east of Jerusalem, and between these lay a patch of rocky country without communications. Clearly the next step for Allenby was to cross to the east of the Jordan and cut the Hedjaz railway, with the assistance of the Arab army from the south. If traffic on this railway were interrupted the Turkish forces in Arabia would be at his mercy.

But first he had to secure his advanced bases at Jaffa and Jerusalem. This work was done before the close of the year. He then turned his attention to safeguarding his right flank by driving the enemy beyond the Jordan. Jericho fell to the Australians on the 1st February, and the move eastward across the river began. It proved, however, unexpectedly difficult. The promised Arab assistance was not forthcoming in time, and early in May the British troops, except for a bridge-head garrison, were again on the west side of Jordan. Allenby for a time was compelled to hold his hand. The grave situation in France made it necessary for him to reorganize his forces, for all white troops that could be spared were ordered to the Western front. In their place he received cavalry and infantry from Mesopotamia and India.

We come now to what must rank as one of the most dramatic tales in the whole campaign—an exploit undertaken at the precise moment when its chances were brightest and its influence on the general strategy of the war most vital—an exploit, moreover, which was perfectly planned, perfectly executed, and overwhelming in its success. The little campaign which began three years before on the banks of the Suez Canal had grown slowly to a major operation. In face of every difficulty the Allies had crept forward, first across the Sinai Desert, then, after long delays, through the Turkish defences of the south, and then in a bold sweep to the gates of the Holy City.

This campaign had always been fought with only the margin of strength which could be spared from the greater contests in the West. But it had moved patiently to its appointed end, for it was carried on in the true tradition of those

dogged earlier wars of Britain which had created her Empire. Our feet might be stayed for a season, or even retire, but in the long run they always moved forward. The Last Crusade was now approaching its climax, and the Crusaders were such as would have startled the souls of St. Louis and Raymond and Richard of England, could they have beheld that amazing army. For only a modest portion of it was drawn from the Western peoples. Algerian and Indian Moslems, Arab tribesmen, men of the thousand creeds of Hindustan, African negroes, and Jewish battalions were among the liberators of the sacred land of Christendom.

In September 1918 the Turkish armies of Syria held a front from the coast north of Jaffa through the hills of Ephraim to a point half-way between Nablus and Jerusalem, and thence to the Jordan, and down its eastern bank to the Dead Sea. On the right lay the VIIIth Turkish Army, in the centre the VIIth, and east of Jordan the IVth. Far on their left flank they were threatened by the Arabs under Sherif Feisal and Colonel T. E. Lawrence. Allenby's plan was to defeat the enemy west of Jordan, and so either to isolate or compel the retreat of the IVth Army. The communications of the Turkish centre and right wing were poor, and if their front could be broken and our cavalry sent through, it was possible that these might be cut. Allenby therefore thinned his front elsewhere, and concentrated his main energies on breaking up the VIIIth Army in the Plain of Sharon, and thus opening the route for his cavalry.

At 4.30 on the morning of the 19th September British cavalry attacked and won an immediate victory, sweeping through the enemy's defences in the Plain of Sharon. The VIIIth Army was in utter rout, pouring along the northern roads, while the main body of our cavalry was riding for Esdraelon to cut them off. That night the VIIth Turkish Army was also pressed back in the centre. By noon that day the leading troops of our cavalry were 18 miles north of their old front line; that afternoon they were through the barrier of the Samarian hills; and early next morning they reached Nazareth, and all but captured the German commander-in-chief. On the night of the 20th one cavalry division reached Beisan, 80 miles from their starting point, and so shut the last outlet from the south. In thirty-six hours the trap had been closed. Every track and road was choked with the rout. Camps and depots were in flames, and our airmen steadily bombarded each section of the retreat.

There now remained only the IVth Army, east of the Jordan. Till the third day of the battle it had shown no signs of moving, but on the morning of the 23rd it began a leisurely retreat. Meantime the British had joined hands with Feisal's Arabs, and pressed the fugitives along the Hedjaz railway. The game was now wholly in Allenby's hands. His next step was to move on Damascus, and so intercept what was left of the IVth Army in its northward flight. On the afternoon of the 25th, the 4th Cavalry Division moved out of Beisan on its

120 miles' ride, and the Australian Mounted Division followed next day by the northern route. On the 30th British cavalry lay 12 miles south-west of Damascus, and all the northern and north-western exits had been closed. At 6 o'clock on the morning of the 1st October the British and Arabs entered the city.

[image]

Palestine—the Decisive Battle.

It was the twelfth day from the opening of the attack. Three Turkish armies had melted away, over 60,000 prisoners and between 300 and 400 guns were in Allenby's hands, and the dash for Damascus had destroyed the faintest possibility of an enemy stand. All that remained was a mob of 17,000 Turks and Germans, fleeing north without discipline or purpose.

Of the many brilliant episodes of those marvellous twelve days, perhaps the most brilliant was the converging movement of the British Desert Corps and Feisal's Arabs on the most ancient of the world's cities. Damascus had been an emporium when Tyre was young, and she was still a mighty city centuries after Tyre had become a shadow. Rich in holy places, she had one shrine of peculiar interest for this last crusade. Within her walls lay the tomb of Saladin, the greatest of those who fought in Palestine in the battle of Asia against Europe. One of Feisal's first acts was to remove the tawdry bronze wreath with which the German Emperor in 1898 had seen fit to adorn the sleeping-place of the great Sultan.

Allenby did not rest upon his laurels. On the 8th he was in Beirut, on the 11th in Baalbek. The next and last stage was Aleppo, that mart through which in the Middle Ages the wealth of Asia flowed to Venice and the West. A cavalry division went forward, and on the 26th October entered the town. Patrols advanced 15 miles farther, and occupied Muslimie railway junction. This last was a fitting conclusion to a great exploit, for it meant the cutting of the Bagdad railway, the line which was to link Berlin with the Persian Gulf and threaten our Indian Empire. Four days later Turkey signed the Armistice which was her surrender. Bulgaria had already laid down her arms, Austria was on the eve of collapse, and Germany was left without allies, and with her front crumbling

before Foch and Haig.

PART IV.

THE SILENT SERVICE.

CHAPTER XXI.
THE SILENT SERVICE.

The British Navy earned during the war the title of "The Silent Service," and the phrase needs a word of comment, for it is full of meaning. There has always been a feeling in the Service that sea-power is the one thing vitally necessary to the safety of the Empire, and that so long as this is being maintained the less talk about it the better; for where the life of nations is daily and hourly in trust, all advertisement is unworthy and all description inadequate. Then the Great War came, and the landsmen, who form the bulk of our people all over the world, naturally wished to know how the Sea Service was handling the affair; but the rule of silence still held. For the Navy, besides their old tradition, had now the reason of policy on their side; operations at sea can be, and must be, kept secret to a degree which is not possible in a land campaign. To inform the public at home would be to take the chance of being overheard by the enemy.

Moreover the work of the Navy is so multifarious, so technical, and so far-sighted in its aims, that by far the greater part of it would always be difficult to grasp. The ordinary news-reading citizen must be content to judge of it by its results, and he is not always capable of doing even that. Neither in this country, nor in the Dominions overseas, still less in the outer world, has the supreme importance or the decisive achievement of our naval Service been realized. Yet to those who understand, the influence of sea-power on history has never been so conclusively demonstrated. In this war, as in the war of a hundred years before, it was from first to last our ships that lay between a military despot and the domination of the world.

To prove this it is only necessary to make a plain statement of the tasks which the British Navy had to undertake in August 1914, to mark the fact that a

failure in any one of them would have involved the ruin of the Allied cause; and to remember that no such failure occurred. The gigantic scope of the effort may then be seen; but even then only by those whose vision is wide enough to survey the whole world at once as one vast field of conflict.

First, then, our Fleet undertook to blockade the enemy; to drive his commerce from the seas; to stop his sea-borne supplies, especially foodstuffs, cotton—the raw material of explosives—and munitions of all kinds; also to disable his credit by the stoppage of his export trade.

Secondly, the protection of our own commerce necessitated the control of all the seas of the world. The Atlantic was our main avenue of supply, but we had also to maintain and guard the routes to and from Australia, New Zealand, India, and China; and a Northern Patrol was necessary to ensure the passage from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the north of Russia.

Thirdly, the enemy's main naval force had to be put out of action: that is to say, the North Sea must be effectively controlled by a Grand Fleet capable of dealing with the German High Sea Fleet.

Fourthly, the transfer of enemy troops across the sea must be made impossible; and, in particular, strong flotillas and secondary fleets must be maintained on our own coasts as a guard against possible attempts at invasion.

[image]

ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE
(VISCOUNT JELLICOE OF SCAPA).

Fifthly, the transport of our own troops and of those of our Allies must be covered from attack. Under this head alone there were included before the end a number of simultaneous operations entirely beyond example in the history of war. An army of some six millions was passed oversea from the British Isles, from India, from Australia, and New Zealand (and at last more millions from America) to France, to India, to Africa (East and West), to Egypt and Palestine, to Gallipoli and Salonika.

Sixthly, the supplies to all these forces, and to most of them simultaneously, had to be maintained for more than four full years and on a scale hitherto unimagined.

Seventhly, in several campaigns the Navy had to co-operate in the military operations, notably in Gallipoli, in battles near the Belgian coast, and in the attack on the fortified harbour of Zeebrugge.

These seven heads cover every recognized department of naval war; but it

must be added that when this latest war changed its character and became an unrestricted submarine campaign, new developments were necessary and were immediately carried out. Under the second and third of the above headings, an entirely new fleet of mine-sweepers, trawlers, and anti-submarine patrols had to be provided, manned, and equipped, to secure the safety both of our ships of war and of our mercantile marine.

It will be seen that these tasks, taken altogether, formed a work of which only one Power in the world was capable; while taken separately they appear plainly as seven threads upon every one of which the fate of the common cause depended absolutely. The effort of the Allies in this war was distinguished first by the early heroism of the Belgian, Serbian, and Russian troops; then by the long and desperate endurance of the French, British, and Italian armies; finally, it was reinforced by the large contingent of late-comers from America, and carried to victory by the supreme genius of Foch. But behind and beneath all these lay another force, scarcely thought of at the time, and since almost forgotten, though to it they all owed the very possibility of their military existence. During those four years the British Fleet never ceased to carry great armies over sea; to sweep every ocean clean, and guard the territories along their shores; to shut up the hostile Empire within an impassable barrier. In a word, it retained every day and every night, from the first hour of the war to the last, that control which was the most vital condition of success.

In so doing it suffered some losses and achieved stirring successes, of which one or two are related in the pages which follow. But it must always be remembered that these are but incidents; the business of the British Navy is the right use of the sea, and not conquest or display. For it, therefore, victory is not the affair of a day here or a day there, however rousing to the blood: it lies rather in what is neither spectacular nor resounding—in the monotonous but manifold perfection of an indispensable service.

CHAPTER XXII.
CORONEL.

The battle of Coronel will always have a peculiar interest for us: there is a mystery about it which can never be finally cleared up. At the outbreak of war a British admiral, Sir Christopher Cradock, was in charge of a large and important

area off the coast of South America. It was his business to keep this area clear of the enemy squadron under Admiral Graf von Spee, which was much stronger than his own, but was believed to be scattered on the trade routes. In the end Cradock found the enemy squadron united and in much superior force. He instantly attacked, and went down in the action, with two of his ships.

The problem is to ascertain what were his motives for this swift decision to fight against overwhelming odds. Not a man in the flagship survived, and we must do the best with what evidence we have before us. We know the admiral's general idea of the work he had to do; we know what his instructions were, what force he asked for and what was given him; we know the speed and gun-power of the enemy ships, and what he as an experienced commander must have thought of them. Finally, we know the nature of the choice which was open to him; and in face of all this the mystery remains.

The key to it probably lies in the character of the man who had to make the decision; and from this point of view the story is a fine one. While every one is free to form an opinion on the facts, the judgment of those who knew Cradock best is the simplest and the most favourable one. A certain margin of discretion must be allowed to every admiral in time of war; and at the moment of crisis a man of powerful character and vision may go even further, and take the great responsibility of departing from the line of strict obedience to orders. To Cradock's friends it seems clear that he saw himself and his squadron as representing the prestige of his country in combat with a superior force which might be disabled, if it could not be destroyed; he saw that duty might be fulfilled, and honour and success attained, though victory should be impossible. So he hunted his great enemy both skilfully and fearlessly, but relied at a pinch rather on courage than on caution.

From the outbreak of war the German China Squadron, as we now know, was never wholly dispersed: Spee detached ships from time to time to the coast of South America, but remained himself with the strongest part of his force in the Pacific, where he was heard of only at intervals. He might possibly be intending to go westwards and raid the Indian Ocean, as the *Emden* actually did. He moved, in fact, on Samoa, but when he arrived there on September 14, 1914, he found Apia already safe in the hands of the New Zealanders, and not a ship in the harbour. He left again for Suvarov Island, coaled in the Society Islands, bombarded the French capital Papieté on the 22nd September, and appeared to be making for South America; he might be thinking of a dash through the Magellan Straits to attack our trade on the eastern coast.

The British Admiralty knew the danger of this. Spee's two principal ships—the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau*—were fast ships and well armed, with prize gunnery crews. To hunt them satisfactorily a pair of battle-cruisers were re-

quired, and these could not well be spared from the Grand Fleet. The *Indefatigable* was therefore ordered out from the Mediterranean, with the fast cruiser *Defence*; but the Cabinet refused to spare the *Indefatigable*, and the *Canopus*, an old and slow battleship, with 12-inch guns, was sent, with the *Defence* to follow. Admiral Cradock was ordered to concentrate meanwhile at the Falkland Islands, with his flagship, the *Good Hope*, the cruisers *Monmouth* and *Glasgow*, and some ships of inferior armament.

The *Canopus* was a whole week late in arriving. Cradock was most anxious to prevent Spee from coming round the Horn to raid the east coast, and he feared that if he kept the old 12-knot battleship with him he might be too late to bar the enemy's passage. In this crisis he took his first great risk: he sent the *Canopus* by the shorter way, through Magellan's Straits, and took the weaker ships boldly round the Horn. Spee, however, was not in the south; he had spent six days in concentrating at Easter Island, and was at this moment making for the island of Mas-a-Fuera, 500 miles west of Valparaiso.

Cradock now had the *Canopus* with him again. His instructions were that he was not expected to act without her; but her slow speed continued to hamper him in carrying out his definite orders to search for the enemy and destroy them. He accordingly ordered the *Defence* to join him from the east coast, where she had been sent by the Admiralty, and went north in the meantime to find the cruiser *Leipzig*, which was believed to be in front of him, operating alone. Unfortunately the *Canopus* was once more in need of repairs, and had to be left behind for twenty-four hours.

[image]

Battle of Coronel.

The two squadrons, British and German, were now, without knowing it, in the act of converging upon one another. Each admiral believed himself to be in pursuit of a single ship, for, while Cradock was after the *Leipzig*, Spee was in chase of the *Glasgow* (Captain Luce), who had been sent on to Coronel on the west coast with a message. The force of the opponents was as follows: Admiral von Spee had two powerful ships, the *Scharnhorst* (flagship) and the *Gneisenau*, each of 11,420 tons, armed with eight 8-inch and six 6-inch guns; and their gunners were of high repute. His other ships, the *Leipzig*, *Dresden*, and *Nürnberg*, were light cruisers, each carrying ten 4-inch guns. Against these Cradock had the *Good Hope*, a twelve-year-old cruiser of 14,000 tons, armed with two 9.2-inch guns; the cruiser *Monmouth*, with 6-inch guns only; the *Glasgow*, a light fast cruiser, with

two 6-inch and ten 4-inch guns, and the auxiliary cruiser *Otranto*, which was not sufficiently armed to take part in an action. He knew, as well as any one living, what was the meaning of these figures, and he must have been hoping that the *Canopus*, with her 12-inch guns, would rejoin him before he met his enemy.

The *Glasgow* despatched her message from Coronel, and at 2.30 p.m. on the 1st November she rejoined her squadron. Cradock was still steaming north when, at 4.40, she sighted and reported to him the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, and *Leipzig*, visible to the east. He had found the ship he was chasing, but he had found her in company with her powerful consorts; and the *Dresden* and the *Nürnberg* were, in fact, also present, though they were not yet in sight.

Cradock had but a few minutes in which to make his decision. Was he to fight or run? Even the three enemy ships which were in sight were more than a match for his own. His two big guns might make a few lucky hits, but they could not keep down the fire of eight times their number, laid by prize gunners with the choice of range and position. To fight was highly dangerous; yet the alternative evidently looked to him still less attractive. The enemy was nearly due east; the *Canopus* was coming up slowly from the south, 250 miles away; if he were to turn and run he might be able to join her in nine hours or even in eight. But Spee had the position of advantage inshore; he would be racing down the shorter side of the triangle, and with his 23 knots could overtake the *Monmouth* for certain, and possibly cut in between the others and the *Canopus*. During the chase he would have a fighting light for three hours, and after that a moonlight equally to his advantage.

We cannot tell whether Cradock weighed these considerations anxiously, or whether he instinctively felt that the tradition of the Navy would be more injured by his flight than by his own defeat and death. He does not seem to have hesitated. At 5.10 p.m. he signalled to his squadron to concentrate on the *Glasgow*—the ship nearest the enemy—and attempted to cross Spee's line so as to gain the inshore position. The German admiral, however, kept away successfully, and at 6.18 Cradock made a wireless signal to the *Canopus*, giving his position, and adding, "I am going to attack enemy now."

At 7 o'clock the sun set, and Spee, having now every advantage of light, opened fire at 12,000 yards. The *Good Hope* in reply made a hit or two, but her forward 9.2 gun was soon knocked out, and the ship set on fire. The *Monmouth* was also burning within three minutes. The *Glasgow* was engaged by both the *Leipzig* and the *Dresden*, but was saved by the German smoke which drifted towards her. With the sunset glow behind them, our ships were a fair target, while the British gunners could no longer see anything but the flash of the enemy's guns. Both the *Good Hope* and the *Monmouth* were continually on fire, and at 7.45 the flagship blew up with an explosion which sent up flames 200 feet high.

By 8 o'clock the *Monmouth* too was silenced and sinking in the heavy seas; as the moon rose the German ships could just be seen closing on her.

Captain Luce, left alone with the *Glasgow* and the *Otranto*, had now to face the most painful duty of his life. His ship had been hit by only five shells out of the six hundred aimed at her, and he was in a position to make use of her superior speed by going to warn the *Canopus* of the danger towards which she was heading. He steered north-west into the darkness, intending to turn south as soon as he was out of sight. The *Monmouth's* men were all crowded on her quarterdeck, and they cheered the *Glasgow* as they saw her going away—a cheer that should never be forgotten when the tale is told. At 9.20 firing was heard again, and from the *Glasgow* seventy-five flashes were counted—"No doubt," says Captain Luce, "the final attack on the *Monmouth*." She went down, like the *Good Hope*, with all hands.

So ended Cradock's forlorn hope, and the mystery of it will remain with us. One thing is certain, that whatever was the motive for his decision, it could not have been a discreditable one—a man does not fling away his command, his professional chances, and his own life out of sheer recklessness. We may safely infer, then, that Cradock was attempting the best that was possible for his country at the hazard of everything that he valued most. For this he took the final responsibility of disobeying his orders; and for this he paid the full price. It is difficult to think him wrong, and not difficult to hold him justified. He gave something to the enemy, but far more to his own Service. When darkness fell on Coronel, Spee's triumph had but thirty-seven days to run. The tradition of Cradock's unflinching devotion will last as long as the British Navy; and it is by such traditions that sea power is built and sustained. Naval supremacy will never be won or kept by the consistent refusal of unequal fights.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FALKLANDS.

News of Coronel was received by the Admiralty on the 4th November; it was given to the public unofficially on the 5th and officially on the 17th. By that time the counterstroke had been not only prepared, but launched. Speed and secrecy were an urgent necessity, for the Falkland Islands, a valuable coaling-station with a wireless installation and a fine double harbour, were certain to be in danger

from the victorious enemy. The population numbered only 2,000, mostly Scottish shepherds, and the inhabitants of the capital, Port Stanley, proposed to abandon the town and take refuge on the moors. But on the 8th November the *Canopus* and the *Glasgow* ran in on their way north, and on the 12th the *Canopus* returned with orders to remain and defend the coaling-station. Captain Grant grounded his ship on the harbour mud, disguised her by dazzle-painting, and made her into a fort. The work took three weeks.

In the meantime the new Board of Admiralty were taking action on the plan originally proposed by their predecessors. The Grand Fleet had now been reinforced, and could spare the battle-cruisers *Invincible* and *Inflexible*. These two ships came round to Devonport on the 8th November for repairs. On the 9th Admiral Sturdee was appointed Commander-in-Chief in the South Atlantic and Pacific—from Pernambuco to China. The service in hand demanded perfect secrecy and perfect efficiency: a sudden and irresistible counterstroke was to be delivered, and the two principal ships were to be returned immediately with unimpaired fighting value. It was a mission offering unique powers and responsibilities.

The admiral had all the qualities necessary for success and one gift more—that of complete and invariable good fortune. He was to concentrate either off the Panama Canal or the islets known as the Abrolhos Rocks far down towards Rio, according as he could best guess at Spee's intentions. He guessed right, and chose the latter rendezvous, where, on the 26th, he met Admiral Stoddart with the *Carnarvon*, *Cornwall*, *Defence*, *Kent*, *Bristol*, and *Orama*.

[image]

Battle of the Falkland Islands—December 8.
First Phase—8 a.m.

On the same day, as it happened, Spee was moving south from St. Quentin Bay for an attack upon the Falklands, and Sturdee was receiving final orders to base himself upon the Falklands and search for Spee round the Horn. The meeting was therefore certain; but the fate of Port Stanley depended on the race between the two opposing squadrons. Fortune again favoured Sturdee: he was delayed at first by false reports, but Spee lost four full days in capturing and plundering a British collier. When he appeared off the Falklands in the early morning of the 8th December, Sturdee had already been nearly eighteen hours in harbour, and his ships had been busily coaling all night.

When Spee was sighted from Port Stanley his arrival was a surprise to the

British squadron. The battle-cruisers had not yet received their full supply of coal. But their oil supply was untouched, and by the admiral's foresight steam had been ordered at half an hour's notice for the *Kent* and the *Inflexible*, and at two hours' for the rest. The signal to prepare to weigh and to raise steam was made at 8.14 a.m. The *Gneisenau* and the *Nürnberg*, after sheering off at a couple of salvos from the *Canopus*, came on again at 9.30 to attack the *Kent* and the *Glasgow*, who were already on guard outside the harbour. The German ships were immediately recalled—their admiral may not have known yet that the battle-cruisers were there; but the report he received convinced him that he was in the presence of a superior force, and must therefore avoid action if possible, in accordance with German naval orders or tradition. He was a brave and chivalrous commander, and it was his misfortune that he was not at liberty to stand in to the harbour mouth and fight his enemy at close range while the squadron was coming out ship by ship. His own armour was superior to that of the battle-cruisers, and his guns were effective up to 13,000 yards; he could not have avoided destruction, but he could certainly have inflicted serious damage.

Instead of acting thus, he signalled to raise steam and steer east with all speed. The battle-cruisers were now out of harbour, and visible to him; the *Glasgow* and the *Kent* were ahead, keeping touch, and Admiral Sturdee made the signal for "General Chase." The five German ships were hull down on the horizon, but the sky was clear; there was a light breeze and a calm sea; visibility was at its maximum: a combination fatal for the pursued. More fatal still was the character of the pursuer: a scientific seaman and tactician, a commander spirited and self-confident, cool and decisive. There would be difficulties from wind and smoke, and from the differences in the speed of his ships; but Admiral Sturdee had his chance before him, complete though not perfect, and he would grasp it with no uncertain hand.

[image]

Battle of the Falkland Islands—December 8.
Second Phase—11 a.m.

He began by taking the battle-cruisers ahead at 26-½ knots; then slowed down, cleared for action, and piped the men to dinner at 11.30 as usual; changing course at the same time to converge upon the enemy. At 12.20 he increased to 25 knots, and opened fire on the *Leipzig*, now within 15,000 yards. She was soon on fire, and at 1.20 turned away south-west with the *Nürnberg* and the *Dresden*. Admiral von Spee was dividing his squadron, in hope of saving some part of

it. But Admiral Sturdee had foreseen this move. Without any fresh signal, the *Glasgow*, the *Kent*, and the *Cornwall* at once followed the light cruisers; Captain Luce was to have the honour of a separate action to himself, while the battle-cruisers and the *Carnarvon* held on after Spee.

The main action began with an experimental stage; the German ships concentrated their fire on the *Invincible*, but could not reach her. On the other hand, her smoke was smothering the *Inflexible*. At 2.5 Sturdee began to close, and Spee, covered by his own smoke, turned to starboard, and went off at full speed after his light cruisers. By 2.45 he was again overtaken. He then turned to port, and reduced the range; he had decided that the time was come to do what damage he could before the inevitable end.

He opened fire with every gun he had; but here, as in the fight of the *Sydney* against the *Emden*, and afterwards at Jutland, the German gunners, though highly trained, could not long keep their accuracy under British fire. The duel was practically decided in the first ten minutes: the *Gneisenau* was badly hit by the *Inflexible*, the *Scharnhorst* was set on fire and lost a funnel; both were staggering and smoking desperately. Sturdee seized his advantage, turned eighteen points, and crossed their wake; under his raking fire the *Gneisenau* listed till her 6-inch guns could no longer fire, the *Scharnhorst* lost all her funnels and all her port guns. Spee turned gallantly to bring his fresh broadside to bear, but at 4.0 his flagship ceased fire suddenly, and lay down on her beam ends; soon she heeled over, her stern rose steeply, and she went down head foremost. Admiral Sturdee's chivalrous dispatch records that Admiral von Spee's flag was flying to the last.

None of the sinking crew could be saved, for the *Gneisenau* was still fighting. The three British ships concentrated on her from three sides; at 5.8 her forward funnel fell, and her fire slackened; at 5.15 she hit the *Invincible* with a single shell; at 5.30 she turned round and stopped dead. At 5.40 she ceased firing, and hauled down one of her two flags; at 5.50, while her three enemies were rushing in at 20 knots to save life, she lay down on her beam ends very suddenly and plunged. Of her complement of 800, some 200 were still alive, and nearly all of these were rescued: 166 recovered; 14 who died of exhaustion were buried next day with full military honours.

Sturdee's next thought was for Captain Luce and his ships. He gave them his own news by wireless, and asked for theirs. The *Glasgow* replied that she and the *Cornwall* were over 70 miles to the south, and the *Kent* out of sight and hearing of them. It seemed not impossible that the *Nürnberg* had disposed of her by throwing mines overboard during the chase. But this was not so; Sturdee's good fortune was not to be broken. The *Dresden*, it is true, evaded him, but only because her superior speed and 12 miles' start enabled her to abandon her

squadron when she pleased. The other two light cruisers fought gallantly, but failed to escape destruction. In their flight they separated, and the two defeats must be separately described.

When the *Dresden* decided to run out of action at 27 knots, after the first turn away, Captain Luce wasted no time in chasing her, but laid himself alongside of the *Leipzig*, the rear ship, in hope of tempting her consorts to fall back to her support. His manoeuvre was to close her repeatedly, engaging with his forward 6-inch gun, and forcing her to turn her broadside to reply. Each time she did so, the *Kent* and the *Cornwall* drew nearer, till at 3.36 they could attack the *Nürnberg* and the *Leipzig* respectively. The *Dresden* refused to turn back: she disappeared into the mist, not to be seen again till March 1915, when she surrendered and blew up after a five minutes' action with the *Kent* and the *Glasgow*, who had caught her at anchor.

The *Nürnberg* now turned away east, pursued by the *Kent*; the *Cornwall* began to hit the *Leipzig*, who was already engaged with the Glasgow. Captain Luce, having here the superior speed, turned right round and passed under his enemy's stern, raking her with his fresh broadside; then circled round the *Cornwall*, and came again into action ahead of her. At 6.0, after nearly two hours of such tactics, he gave the order to close; at 6.35 he received the admiral's wireless message of victory; at 7.17 he saw his own opponent silenced and burning furiously. He waited half an hour for her surrender, and then opened fire again. At that she burned green lights, and he at once lowered his boats. Five officers and thirteen men had been rescued, when the blazing *Leipzig* turned over to port and sank.

[image]

Battle of the Falkland Islands—December 8.
Last Phase.

The *Kent's* success was of a different kind. Normally she had but 23-½ knots of speed to the *Nürnberg's* 25; but her engine-room department by consummate skill and energy forced their lame duck to a speed which at the end of nearly four hours brought her within 12,000 yards of her enemy. Both ships opened fire, the *Kent* receiving one hit and making two. The *Nürnberg* then burst two of her boilers, and dropped to 19 knots, turned eight points to port, and engaged with her broadside. Captain Allen accepted the challenge, ran on, and placed the *Kent* before her beam at 6,000 yards. By 6.10 he had her burning and almost silenced; he ran on again, and raked her at 3,500 yards, destroying all her guns forward.

At 6.30 she was silent and motionless. A few more shots, and she hauled down her flag. Captain Allen hastily repaired and lowered two of his damaged boats; but before they could reach her the *Nürnberg* turned over and sank. Twelve of her men were found, but only seven survived.

Commander Wharton of the *Kent* has memorably described the final scene. "It was strange and weird, all this aftermath, the wind rapidly arising from the westward, darkness closing in, one ship heaving to the swell, well battered, the foretop-gallant mast gone. Of the other, nothing to be seen but floating wreckage, with here and there a man clinging, and the 'molly hawks' (vultures of the sea) swooping by. The wind moaned, and death was in the air. Then see! Out of the mist loomed a great four-masted barque under full canvas. A great ghost-ship she seemed. Slowly, majestically, she sailed by, and vanished in the night." The battle-cruisers' fight had been visited, earlier in the day, by the same ghost-ship; manned, it might easily be imagined, by phantom seamen of the Nelsonian age.

Not since that age, and seldom even then, had so impressive a victory been won at sea: it was not a defeat of the enemy, it was his annihilation. Admiral Sturdee had seized all his opportunities, surmounted all his difficulties, and attained all his objects; he was even able to return his most valuable ships to the Grand Fleet practically intact and in the shortest possible time. It may be added that in a fine dispatch he showed once more how a British admiral writes of his enemy's fate and of his own achievement.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MYSTERY SHIPS.

It was towards the end of 1914 that the German Admiralty conceived the idea of blockading the British Isles by means of a submarine fleet. The enterprise was a difficult one; for the pursuit and capture of commerce a submarine is very ill fitted. A frail boat with a small crew cannot afford to hold up and examine a ship on the surface; still less to put a prize crew on board and send the captured vessel into port. It was therefore decided that to carry out the blockade merchant ships must be sunk without examination and without warning. If crews, passengers, or even neutrals perished in this process, the "blame," says Admiral Scheer, "would attach to those who despised our warnings." No civilized power had ever before threatened to kill non-combatants on logical principles of this kind, and as soon

as it was seen that the German Admiralty were attempting to carry out their murderous intentions it became necessary to devise means of destroying their U-boats wherever they could be found.

They were accordingly hunted by destroyers, by trawlers, by submarines, and by airships and seaplanes; they were destroyed by gun fire, by mines, by nets, by torpedoes, and by depth charges, and all these were used with the greatest skill and success. Of all the hunting methods, perhaps the most attractive to the English sporting instinct was that of the Mystery Ships, or Q-boats. This was at first merely the use of a simple trap, but was developed by the genius of a single man into an entirely novel campaign of the most heroic kind.

The Special Service ship or Q-boat of 1915 was a tramp or collier with a concealed armament for the decoying and destruction of submarines. The first success was achieved on July 25, 1915, when one of them, the *Prince Charles* (Lieutenant W. P. Mark-Wardlaw), was pursued and shelled by U36, near North Rona Island. Her crew abandoned ship, leaving their gunners concealed on board. The U-boat thereupon closed; but when she was within five hundred yards of her apparently helpless prey, the British guns were suddenly unmasked, and the submarine sank under their fire, leaving fifteen of her crew to be rescued by the victors.

It was about this same time that a young lieutenant-commander named Gordon Campbell put to sea in charge of the Special Service ship *Farnborough*, formerly a collier, and now manned from the Mercantile Marine and Royal Naval Reserve. For six months the cruise was unsuccessful, but in the spring of 1916 the *Farnborough's* look-out at last sighted a U-boat, which, after firing a torpedo at her, broke surface within 1,000 yards, and summoned the supposed tramp with a shot across her bows. Lieutenant-Commander Campbell, who had trained his crew to a perfect knowledge of the game they had to play, stopped the ship, blew off steam ostentatiously, and ordered a "panic abandon ship." The U-boat came nearer, and reopened fire. Lieutenant-Commander Campbell, who was still concealed aboard his ship, then hoisted the white ensign and unmasked his guns. With twenty-one shots from her 12-pounders the *Farnborough* drove the U-boat under water, then steamed full speed towards her with depth charges, and when she reappeared mortally wounded, sent her to the bottom with five more rounds at point-blank range.

Three weeks afterwards the *Farnborough* had the good fortune to be attacked by another U-boat, with whom she fought a surface action at a range of nearly 1,000 yards, disabling her at the second shot, and finally blowing her up.

The Germans quickly perceived the deadliness of this new method, which made every attack on a merchant vessel a possible disaster for the U-boat, and their press was instructed to complain of the unscrupulousness of an enemy who

used disguised ships and took the attacker by surprise. Commanders of U-boats were instructed to use greater caution in approaching their victims, and it soon became evident to Commander Campbell that they would no longer venture to come near a live ship. He determined to tempt them with a wounded one.

When his new ship, Q5, was attacked by a U-boat early in 1917, he manoeuvred intentionally to get her torpedoed. The crew then abandoned ship as before, while Commander Campbell and his gunners lay hidden in the waterlogged vessel, watching until the timid enemy should venture to the surface to finish her off. It took the U-boat twenty minutes to make up her mind. She then came up within 300 yards, and approached to fire a second torpedo, with her captain visible on his conning-tower. The first shot fired from Q5 took off his head, and the boat was then completely shattered; one officer and one man were picked up alive. Q5, with water in her engine-room, boiler-rooms, and holds, then signalled for help, and was taken in tow by Lieutenant-Commander W. W. Hallwright of the *Laburnum*, with the assistance of the *Narwhal*, the *Buttercup*, and the trawler *Luneta*; after a night of heroic exertions and great danger she was brought safely into port. Commander Campbell received the Victoria Cross. Of his officers and crew he wrote: "They may almost be said to have passed through the supreme test of discipline. The chief engineer and the engine-room watch remained at their posts and kept the dynamos going until driven out by water. They then had to hide on top of the engine-room. The guns' crews had to remain concealed in their gun-houses for nearly half an hour, where we could feel the ship going down by the stern. At that time it appeared touch and go whether the ship would sink before we sank the enemy."

Four months afterwards Campbell and his men were out again, in the Special Service ship *Pargust*, and were again successful in being torpedoed. This time the U-boat, after some hesitation, came within 50 yards, and was so much injured by the *Pargust's* fire as to be incapable of submerging. Her crew made tokens of surrender, but when Commander Campbell ceased fire, attempted to make away upon the surface. The *Pargust*, of course, could not follow, but by a lucky shot she exploded a torpedo aboard the U-boat and destroyed her, saving only two of her crew. She was then herself towed into port by the *Crocus*. This time the Victoria Cross was given to Lieutenant R. N. Stuart, D.S.O., R.N.R., and to Seaman William Williams, D.S.M., R.N.R., to be worn on behalf of the whole ship's company.

Captain Campbell's next command was the Special Service ship *Dunraven*, disguised as an armed British merchant vessel. She was zigzagging at eight knots in rough water, when a U-boat opened fire upon her at 5,000 yards. Captain Campbell ran up the white ensign, and returned the fire with a 2-½-pounder, intentionally firing short, and making terrified signals for the U-boat's benefit.

Then, as the shells fell closer, he let off a cloud of steam to indicate boiler trouble, and ordered a "panic abandon ship." The Germans now became more confident, and began to make hits; one shell exploded a depth charge on the *Dunraven's* poop, and blew Lieutenant Charles Bonner, D.S.C., R.N.R., out of his control station. The U-boat then ceased fire, and came past within 500 yards; but she was partly hidden by the smoke from the *Dunraven's* burning poop, and though Captain Campbell knew that his magazine and depth charges must explode sooner or later, he decided to trust his men and wait until the enemy gave him a better chance.

The U-boat kept him waiting just too long. She was passing the *Dunraven's* stern, when the poop blew up, hurling the 4-inch gun and the gun's crew into the air, and starting the "open fire" buzzers at the guns. The U-boat was hit, but not fatally, and at once submerged. Captain Campbell hastily collected his wounded, turned hoses on to the burning poop, where the magazine was still intact, and signalled to an approaching warship to keep away and deflect traffic, as his action was not yet ended. The second stage was begun by the enemy torpedoing the *Dunraven* abaft the engine-room. Captain Campbell at once ordered a "Q abandon ship"—that is, he left his guns visible and pretended that the concealed gunners were now leaving after being detected. The ship continued to burn, and the submarine circled cautiously round, shelling her for forty minutes, then submerged again.

Captain Campbell had still two torpedoes left, and both of these he fired at the submarine. One just missed her head, and the other passed two feet abaft her periscope. He had now lost his last chance of a kill, and signalled urgently for assistance, preparing at the same time for a last fight with a single gun. The American vessel *Noma* came up immediately, followed by the *Attack* and the *Christopher*. The U-boat was driven off, the fire extinguished, and the ship taken in tow by the *Christopher*. During the night it was found necessary to take off her crew and her wounded, and the *Dunraven* was sunk at last by a British gunshot.

In reporting this action Captain Campbell brought specially to notice the extreme bravery of Lieutenant Bonner, who received the Victoria Cross, and the 4-inch gun's crew, to whom the same honour was given. "Lieutenant Bonner, having been blown out of his control by the first explosion, crawled into the gun hatch with the crew. They there remained at their posts with a fire raging in the poop below, and the deck getting red hot. One man tore up his shirt to give pieces to the gun's crew to stop the fumes getting into their throats; others lifted the boxes of cordite off the deck to keep it from exploding; and all the time they knew that they must be blown up, as the secondary supply and magazine was immediately below. They told me afterwards that communication with the main control was cut off, and although they knew they would be blown up, they also

knew that they would spoil the show if they moved, so they remained until actually blown up with their gun. Then when, as wounded men, they were ordered to remain quiet in various places during the second action, they had to lie there unattended and bleeding, with explosions continually going an aboard, and splinters from the enemy's shell-fire penetrating their quarters. Lieutenant Bonner, himself wounded, did what he could for two who were with him in the wardroom. When I visited them after the action they thought little of their wounds, but only expressed their disgust that the enemy had not been sunk. Surely such bravery is hard to equal."

It may be added that such bravery is still harder to defeat. The discipline and devotion which the genius of this commander had imparted to his ship's company, when added to the long-descended seamanship and enterprise of our Service, proved too much for the unscrupulous courage and mechanical skill of the enemy. It cannot be doubted that in any imaginable war at sea the same qualities would produce the same result; for the mystery, after all, lay rather in the men than in the ships.

CHAPTER XXV.
JUTLAND.

On May 30, 1916, the Grand Fleet put to sea for one of its periodical sweeps. Admiral Jellicoe had information which gave him some hope that the enemy might at last be caught in the North Sea; and in fact, on the morning of the 31st, the German High Sea Fleet did come out, in ignorance of Jellicoe's move, but in "hope of meeting with separate enemy divisions." Admiral Scheer had with him the Battle Fleet of fifteen dreadnoughts and six older ships, with three divisions of cruisers, seven torpedo flotillas, and ten zeppelins; and in advance of these was a squadron of five battle-cruisers, under Admiral Hipper, with his own cruisers and destroyers. Advancing towards Hipper was the British Battle-Cruiser Fleet under Admiral Beatty—the *Lion*, *Princess Royal*, *Tiger*, *Queen Mary*, *Indefatigable*, and *New Zealand*—with the Fifth Battle Squadron under Rear-Admiral Evan-Thomas—the *Barham*, *Valiant*, *Malaya*, and *Warspite*; and in front of these were three light-cruiser squadrons under Commodore Goodenough, with four destroyer flotillas. Behind, and at a considerable distance, to avoid alarming the enemy too soon, came Admiral Jellicoe with the main fleet—twenty-four dreadnoughts in six di-

visions abreast of each other, and each in line ahead. He had with him also the Third Battle-Cruiser Squadron, three squadrons of cruisers, and three destroyer flotillas.

The light cruiser *Galatea* first sighted enemy ships at 2.20 p.m. Soon she reported the smoke of a fleet, and at 3.31 Beatty sighted Hipper and formed his line of battle. At 3.48 the action began at 18,500 yards, Hipper racing back towards his fleet and Beatty pursuing. The firing on both sides was rapid and accurate; in twelve minutes the leading ships on both sides had been seriously hit; six minutes more and a salvo, which reached her magazine, destroyed the *Indefatigable*.

The Fifth Battle Squadron now drew up and came into action. Immediately afterwards the enemy sent fifteen destroyers and a light cruiser to attack with torpedoes. They were met by our twelve destroyers, who fought with them a most gallant battle within the main battle, repulsing them and forcing their battle-cruisers to turn. The *Nestor*, the *Nomad*, and two enemy destroyers were sunk; the battle-cruisers swept on, and the action was resumed.

The enemy's gunners now seemed to be losing their first accuracy, and at 4.18 the third ship of the German line was burning. But a few minutes later a salvo struck the *Queen Mary* in a vital part abreast of a turret; in one minute the ship was gone, and the *Tiger*, her next astern, passed over the place where she had been, without seeing any sign of her but smoke and falling debris. Admiral Beatty had lost two of his six battle-cruisers, and his flagship was damaged; but his tactics and his fighting spirit were in no way disturbed.

Twelve minutes later he was cheered by Commodore Goodenough reporting the German Battle Fleet. He had found the enemy at last in the open, and his business now was to draw them on towards the Grand Fleet. He recalled his destroyers and turned his whole force northward. Hipper, still steering south, fought him for a few minutes as they passed one another on opposite courses, and then turned north to follow him. The whole German fleet was now in line; but Beatty, having the superior speed, was able to overlap their head and keep their tail out of action. He engaged their five battle-cruisers with his own four, supported by the *Barham* and the *New Zealand*, while the *Malaya* and the *Warspite* were hammering their leading battleships.

[image]

ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY
(EARL BEATTY OF THE NORTH SEA).

The Grand Fleet was now rapidly approaching, and Admiral Jellicoe had

to prepare for the extremely difficult manoeuvre of joining battle with an enemy of whose position he was not fully informed. Gun-flashes were reported at 6.5 on the starboard bow, but the only ships visible were the *Lion* and other battle-cruisers steering east in thick mist. The admiral lost no time; at 6.8 he ordered two torpedo flotillas to his port front and one to starboard; then, after receiving a further report from Admiral Beatty, at 6.16 he ordered his six divisions of battle-ships to deploy eastwards, forming on the port wing column. He thus threatened to cut off the enemy from his base, and in order to close him the more quickly the deployment was made by divisions instead of in succession. The movement was entirely successful. At the same time the battle-cruisers were getting clear to the south and east, and Admiral Evan-Thomas's four ships were forming astern of the fleet. They did this under fire, but without serious interference; the *Warspite*, whose helm jammed, was for a few moments carried over towards the enemy, but the German gunnery was no longer steady enough to hit her.

[image]

Battle of Jutland.—Track Chart.

For the Germans the horizon was now filled with an unending line of British ships, and the sight, as their own officers said, "took the heart out of the men." They were already "utterly crushed" by the masterly way in which Admiral Jellicoe had brought his huge fleet into action, and they saw that Admiral Beatty was outflanking them by "a model manoeuvre, a performance of the highest order."[#] Their line bent away, first to the east, and then to the south, suffering heavily as it turned, and making not a hit in return.

[#] Captain von Hase.

They had, however, inflicted some losses on the British cruisers while the battle-ships were deploying. Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, who had chased the light cruiser *Wiesbaden* (with the *Defence*, *Warrior*, and *Black Prince*) and crippled her between the lines, came under fire from two German battle-cruisers, and was blown up with the *Defence*, while the *Warrior* and the *Black Prince* were badly hit. Rear-Admiral Hood, too, met his fate; he had been scouting far to the south with the *Invincible*, *Inflexible*, and *Indomitable*, and was returning north to take station at the head of Beatty's line. He executed this manoeuvre in grand style, and at

once engaged the gigantic *Derfflinger*, hitting her repeatedly; but after two minutes of hard pounding a big shell blew up the *Invincible's* magazine, and she sank with her admiral.

But by this time the action between the main fleets had been virtually lost and won. The German battleships at the head of Admiral Scheer's line had suffered severely under the fire of the British rear divisions and were turning away south, while their battle-cruisers were in even worse plight. Two minutes after the *Invincible* sank, the *Lutzow* was no longer able to keep station, and Admiral Hipper was compelled to transfer his flag. But his difficulty was to find a sound ship; his next astern, the *Derfflinger*, had lost her wireless and was gaping with a hole 20 feet square in her bows; the *Seydlitz* had also lost her wireless, and had shipped several thousand tons of water. After being some time in a destroyer, the admiral went aboard the *Moltke*, and sent the *Derfflinger* to lead the line, with only the *Von der Tann* to follow.

Half dead though these three remaining ships were, their hardest task was yet before them. Admiral Scheer was in a desperate position, outmanoeuvred and outfought, with the Grand Fleet in the act of forming line between him and his base; and he is entitled to all credit for the plan which he adopted to secure his escape from total destruction. At 7.12 he ordered Hipper to attack Beatty in hope of breaking his encircling movement, and three minutes afterwards sent his destroyers to hold Jellicoe's line with a torpedo attack, while he got away his crumpled battle fleet to the westward. These tactics cost him dear, but he was successful in increasing his distance and withdrawing his battleships from the fire which must speedily have overwhelmed them.

In the torpedo attack not less than twenty of his torpedoes were seen to cross the British line. All were avoided, for Admiral Jellicoe, acting on principles adopted by the Admiralty some time before, ordered his ships to turn away two or more points as soon as the attack was seen. When it was over they at once turned back towards the enemy, but Admiral Scheer had by that time disappeared westward into the mist. Of his twenty-one battleships twelve had been seriously damaged, and their united fire had made but a single hit on the twenty-six British battleships which engaged them—a hit which wounded three men in the *Colossus*.

The gallant Hipper suffered even more severely. He had no sooner started his attack on Beatty when the *Derfflinger* met more than her match in the *Lion*. In eight minutes she is reported by her chief gunnery officer, Captain von Hase, to have received twenty 15-inch shells, which destroyed turret after turret, carried away her fire control and chart-house, and set her on fire fore and aft. With only two heavy guns left, she drew off and went after her fleet, followed by the *Von der Tann* only. The *Seydlitz* and the *Moltke* had already left the line under cover of the smoke from the burning *Lutzow*. The light was now failing fast; the *Lion*

was still hunting, but could no longer find her prey. In spite of some heavy hits, her admiral and his command were insatiable, and even disappointed. But they had, in fact, achieved a day's fighting which is without a parallel—a battle-cruiser victory complete in itself.

Touch was now lost between the two fleets, and Admiral Jellicoe had to consider his dispositions for the night. He had completely succeeded in interposing between the enemy and their base, and his object was to bar their retreat and secure a final action next day. He therefore placed his battleships to the south in four columns a mile apart, his destroyers 5 miles to their rear, with the battle-cruisers and cruisers to the west, and two light-cruiser squadrons farther north and south. Finally, at 9.30, he sent the mine-laying flotilla leader, *Abdiel*, to lay a minefield towards the Horn Reef—a precaution which resulted in several explosions among enemy ships during the night.

The German commander-in-chief was well aware that in a daylight action he could expect nothing but destruction. He resolved on a rush for home in the dark, and here again he has the credit of a right decision and a right method. He sent his ships to make their way through in detachments. Some three or four light cruisers first ran into our destroyers, slightly damaged the *Castor*, received a torpedo hit, and vanished. Another group of cruisers attacked our Second Light Cruiser Squadron at very short range, inflicted heavy casualties on the *Dublin* and the *Southampton*, and disappeared, but with the loss of the light cruiser *Frauenlob*. The destroyer *Sparrowhawk* was sunk in action with a third group of cruisers, and a little later the *Tipperary*. At midnight some battleships passed near the same flotilla, and one, the *Pommern*, was torpedoed and sunk. Another battleship squadron followed soon after, and sank the destroyer *Ardent*.

At 1.46 a.m. the Twelfth Flotilla, farther north, sighted six Kaiser battleships and attacked them. Captain Stirling, in the *Faulkner*, torpedoed one, and some time later Commander Champion, in the *Nomad*, hit another; but the Germans claim that both the wounded ships reached port. The Ninth Flotilla lost the *Turbulent*, rammed by a large unknown vessel; but at 2.35 the destroyer *Moresby*, of the Thirteenth Flotilla, attacked four *Deutschland* battleships and torpedoed one. Lastly, it is believed that the *Black Prince*, who had been crippled hours before, was seen for a moment under the searchlights and guns of a number of enemy ships, who sank her at once. All this battle by night was fought under the most desperate conditions, the horror of darkness and the glare and crash of sudden death alternating for five hours; but it was far more ruinous to the German fleet than to the British.

When day broke, Admiral Jellicoe formed his fleet in line ahead and turned north; at 5.15 he called in the battle-cruisers; at 6 a.m. he sighted his cruisers, and at 9 the destroyers rejoined. He had now all his force in hand, except the Sixth Di-

vision of six battleships under Admiral Burney, whose flagship, the *Marlborough*, had been hit by a torpedo and was now being sent home under escort to be repaired. This, however, was no cause for delay, and Admiral Jellicoe patrolled the battle area till noon, in search of the enemy, moving first north, then south-west, and finally north by west.

It was clear that Admiral Scheer had no intention of further fighting. He had a zeppelin out scouting, and admits that she reported to him the position of the British fleet. But he was in no condition to move. He had inflicted on us a loss of three battle-cruisers, three armoured cruisers, and eight destroyers; while of his own ships one battleship, one battle-cruiser, four light cruisers, and five destroyers had been sunk. But his effective force had been diminished out of all proportion to ours; his battle-cruisers were in no condition to fight; he had discovered that the whole squadron of pre-dreadnoughts were unable to lie in a modern line of battle, while six of the remaining fifteen were unfit to be anywhere but in dock; of his eleven light cruisers ten had been hit, and four of them sunk. He had, in short, no fleet to make a fight with; whereas Admiral Jellicoe had available twenty-six powerful battleships, all but four of them untouched, six battle-cruisers out of nine, and all his light forces, except three cruisers sunk and three hard hit.

More fatal still, then and for ever, was the injury to the moral stamina and tradition of the German fleet. In that one day they passed from the militant to the mutinous state of mind, and their commander knew it. As Captain Persius wrote afterwards in the *Berliner Tageblatt*: "The losses sustained by our fleet were enormous, in spite of the fact that luck was on our side; and on June 1, 1916, it was clear to every one of intelligence that this fight would be, and must be, the only one to take place. Those in authority have often admitted this openly." The Kaiser did his best to shout our victory down, and he was seconded, though more feebly, by German admirals who knew better. But the High Sea Fleet had failed completely to challenge the control of the sea, and henceforth degenerated towards the final surrender.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BRITISH SUBMARINE SERVICE.

The war record of the British submarine service is unique; the difficulties and

dangers which our men faced and overcame were such as no other navy has attempted. The patrol of the shallow Belgian coast and the hunting down of U-boats was a very different task from torpedoing merchant vessels or hospital ships without warning; and the campaigns in the Marmora and the Baltic were conducted under conditions which had no parallel elsewhere.

A glance at the map will show that the Marmora was not only distant from the British naval base, but that the only line of approach was of an uncommonly formidable character. The channel of the Dardanelles is narrow and winding, with a strong tide perpetually racing down it, and setting strongly into its many bays. It was, moreover, protected by forts with powerful guns and searchlights and torpedo tubes, and by barrages of thick wire and netting; it was also patrolled constantly by armed ships. Yet all these defences were evaded or broken through with marvellous courage and ingenuity; for nearly a year a succession of brilliant commanders took their boats regularly up and down the passage, and made the transport of Turkish troops and munitions first hazardous and finally impracticable. Two battleships, a destroyer, and five gunboats fell to them, besides over thirty steamers, many of which were armed, nine transports, seven ammunition and store ships, and no less than 188 sailing ships and dhows with supplies. It is hardly necessary to add that in no case was violence done to neutrals or non-combatants.

The first officer to take a British submarine up the Dardanelles was Lieutenant Norman Holbrook. It was in December 1914 that his attempt was made, and after equipping his boat, B11, with ingenious devices for jumping obstacles, and running several preliminary trials, he trimmed and dived for Sedd-el-Bahr at the moment when the searchlights were extinguished at dawn. Rather more than four hours after his start he had passed the Straits and was at last able to put his periscope above water. He found his fortune at the same moment. There, on his starboard beam, was a large two-funnelled vessel, painted grey, and flying the Turkish ensign. At 600 yards he fired his starboard torpedo, and dipped for a few seconds. An explosion was heard. B11 came quietly to observation depth again of her own motion, and her commander, still at his periscope, saw the grey ship firing a number of guns. His boat dipped again, but he got her up once more, and this time saw his enemy, the battleship *Messudiyeh*, silent, and sinking slowly by the stern. He turned for home, dived into the channel, and ran along the bottom at full speed; came up to take his bearings, dived again, and by 2 p.m. had cleared the exit. In ten hours he had proved all the possibilities of a novel campaign. He had forced the strongly-barred channel, surprised and sunk a battleship in broad daylight, and returned to report, though he had gone up without information and come down with a damaged compass. Of the boats which followed in the spring and summer of

1915, the most famous were E14 (Lieutenant-Commander E. Courtney Boyle); E11 (Lieutenant-Commander M. E. Nasmith); E12 (Lieutenant-Commander K. M. Bruce); E7 (Lieutenant-Commander Cochrane); E2 (Commander David Stocks); and K1 (Lieutenant Wilfred Pirie). In efficiency all these surpassed everything which had been thought possible of submarines. Their cruises lasted from a fortnight at first to thirty days later, and finally to forty and even forty-eight. During this time they would run 2,000 miles and more, with no resources for supply or repairs beyond what they carried on board. When Commander Boyle brought E14 back to her base in August after her third cruise, she had done over 12,000 miles since leaving England, and had never been out of running order—a record for which her chief engine-room artificer, James Hollier Hague, was promoted to warrant rank.

It is impossible to relate here the adventures, the ingenuities, and the brilliant service which these seven commanders reported in the bald and convincing style of the British Navy. One example only can be given—a typical and not an exceptional one. Lieutenant-Commander Nasmith took E11 up for the first time in May 1915, in succession to Commander Courtney Boyle, who had just returned, leaving the Turks under the belief that the Marmora was infested by a whole flotilla of submarines. By a curious combination of activity and accident, Lieutenant-Commander Nasmith at once confirmed this legend.

On his second day out he "dived unobserved into Constantinople," and torpedoed a Turkish gunboat; five hours later he stopped a small steamer, whose crew did a "panic abandon ship," capsizing all their boats as they were put out. An American gentleman then appeared on the upper deck and conversed amicably, after which he was sent ashore, and the ship, being found to contain a Krupp gun and ammunition, was cleared and sent to the bottom. Two heavily laden store-ships were then attacked. One was sunk and the other driven ashore. Under a hurricane of fire from the shore batteries, the submarine dived and got away towards the Bosphorus. At Galata there was a panic; all shops were closed, troops were disembarked from transports, re-embarked, and again landed. The effect was redoubled next day when the American gentleman returned to tell his story. Probably he had inquired the number of the British submarines on the ground, and had been misunderstood to be asking for the number of the boat he was aboard; for he reported—and the news ran through Constantinople—that there were eleven of our boats in the Marmora, holding up all ships going to the Dardanelles. And E11 did in fact achieve this result. Transports lay idle in the Golden Horn, and as the one real boat and her ten imaginary consorts patrolled the Marmora, Turks and Americans wondered where they had their base, and how it had been prepared in hostile waters.

In August E11 was on duty once more, hunting in couples with E14. Com-

manders Boyle and Nasmith rendezvoused on the 6th, and concerted a plan for shelling troops next day on the land route to Gallipoli. This operation was very successful; in less than three hours E11's 12-pounder twice broke up columns on the coast road. On the following day Commander Boyle destroyed a 5,000 ton supply steamer with torpedo and gun-fire, while Commander Nasmith sank the battleship *Haireddin Barbarossa*. This ship was passing north-east of Gallipoli, escorted by a destroyer. E11 was skilfully brought into position on her starboard beam, and two torpedoes got home amidships. The *Barbarossa* immediately took a list to starboard, altered course towards the shore, and opened a heavy fire. But within twenty minutes a large flash burst from her fore part, and she rolled over and sank.

The Turks attempted to conceal the details of this catastrophe; but they confided to Mr. Einstein of the American Embassy that a gunboat perished with *Barbarossa*, and one of two transports which she was convoying, while the other ran aground. They added that the attack was made by six submarines, who completely surrounded the battleship and her convoy. Commander Nasmith afterwards sank a large collier and two more transports, and then turned his attention again to cutting the enemy's communications by land.

His lieutenant, D'Oyly Hughes, volunteered to take the most dangerous part in an attack on the Ismid railway. A raft was put together behind Kalolimno Island, capable of supporting one man, and carrying his equipment and a charge of explosives. With this Lieutenant D'Oyly Hughes was to reach the shore, and blow up the railway line, or, if possible, the viaduct. The risk involved not only the volunteer but E11 herself, for so long as he had still a chance of returning, she could not quit the neighbourhood, or even conceal herself by submerging.

At 2 a.m. Commander Nasmith took the boat inshore till her nose just grounded, within three feet of the rocks, where there were cliffs on each side high enough to prevent her conning-tower from being seen. Lieutenant D'Oyly Hughes dropped into the water and swam off, pushing his raft towards a spot about 60 yards to the left. Besides his demolition charge he had only a revolver, a bayonet, an electric torch, and a whistle. He found a landing place, scaled the cliff, and prowled along the railway with his heavy charge till he was brought up by the sound of voices; three Turks were sitting by the side of the line. He laid down his guncotton, and made a wide detour to inspect the viaduct, roused a small farmyard on his way, and was again stopped by finding a number of men working a stationary engine at the near end of the viaduct.

He crept back to his gun-cotton, and decided to blow up a low brickwork support over a small hollow, only 150 yards from the men, but a spot where real damage could be inflicted. He muffled the pistol for firing the fuse, but on so still a night it made a very loud noise. The three Turks heard it, and instantly started

to chase their enemy down the line. Lieutenant Hughes had but one chance—to find his way to the shore and swim off. To gain time, he turned and fired at his pursuers; they stopped to return his fire, and he distanced them, gained the shore, and plunged into the water. As he did so he heard with joy the sound of a heavy explosion, with the crash of fragments hurled into the sea. The railway line was effectively cut; but he was three-quarters of a mile from the bay where E11 was lying hid.

He swam out to sea, and after going some 500 yards blew a long blast on his whistle; but the boat failed to hear him. Day was breaking—the time of waiting for him must be short. He swam ashore again, rested on the rocks, and plunged in once more. One by one he had to throw away pistol, torch, and bayonet. At last he rounded the point and his whistle was heard; but at the same moment shouts and rifle fire came from the cliffs above. The boat backed out towards him, determined to save him at any cost.

But now came the most trying part of his adventure. In the early morning mist the bow, the gun, and the conning-tower of the submarine appeared to the distressed swimmer to be three small rowing-boats advancing towards him, and manned, of course, by enemies. He turned back, swam ashore, and tried to hide himself under the cliffs. But he was still cool and clear-headed, and after climbing a few feet looked back and realized his mistake. One last swim of 40 yards, and he was picked up almost exhausted. He had run hard for his life and swum a mile in his clothes. "5.5 a.m.," says E11's log, "dived out of rifle fire, and proceeded out of the Gulf of Ismid."

She ended her cruise with a brilliant week's work; fought an action with three armed tugs, a dhow, and a destroyer, evading the destroyer, and sinking two of the other ships by gun-fire; torpedoed two large transports; bombarded the magazine and railway station at Mudania; battered the viaduct for an hour; and on her return down the Dardanelles passed the obstacles without assistance or misadventure. Her final cruise was in November and December, when she was out forty-eight days, and sank forty-six enemy ships. Her last companion, E2, was recalled two days later, and the campaign was over.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BRITISH SUBMARINE SERVICE (*continued*).

The first of our submarine voyagers in the Baltic was Lieutenant-Commander Max Horton, in E9. He distinguished himself in the early months of the war by sinking a German light cruiser and a destroyer in the North Sea. In January 1915 he entered the Baltic, sank a destroyer on the 29th, a transport on 11th May, and on 5th June another transport and another destroyer. On 2nd July he torpedoed the *Pommern*, a 13,000 ton battleship, with 11-inch guns. He was then joined by E1 (Commander N. F. Laurence), and on 22nd August by E8, whose log contains the best account of the long, intricate, and dangerous voyage out.

Commander Goodhart started in E8 on 18th August, with 1,500 miles of adventure between him and his new base at Reval. He passed warily up the Skagerrack, avoiding the central line of traffic, and diving once under a whole fleet of steam trawlers. At 7 p.m. he came to the surface again, rounded the Skaw at full speed, and entered the Kattegat. In the fading light several merchantmen were seen going north; the shore and island beacons began to twinkle one by one—Hamnskau, Vinga, Skaw, Trindelen, Anholt. But the night was short; by 3 a.m. he must dive again and lie on shoal ground while traffic passed above him. At 5.25 he ventured up, but was put down quickly by a steamer; to be seen might rouse a hunt. At 7 he came up again and did a survey of l-½ hours in a friendly mist, then down again, to crawl at 3 knots till 1 p.m., when he was off the entrance to the Sound.

Here he must choose between going forward submerged, or waiting for darkness and attempting the channel on the surface. He decided to continue his dive into the Sound and wait for night inside. He went in at 50 feet, came up to 21 feet to verify his position, down again to 50, and altered course to pass through the northern narrows. At 4.10 p.m. he was east of Helsingor Light; at 5.20, after another observation, he went to bottom in 11 fathoms, to wait for darkness. At 8.15 p.m. he rose to the surface; the Danish shore was bright with many lights, the Swedish shore all dark. He steered south-westward on the surface, altering course to avoid being seen by two destroyers which were going north along the Danish shore at a great pace; but now one of them suddenly turned south and stopped. E8 ran on, but into still more dangerous waters. The lights of Copenhagen were bright, and a searchlight was working from Middle Ground Fort; now and again it swept across the submarine. Then came several fishing boats, then two red lights moving south, close over to the Danish shore. There was nothing to show that E8 had been seen, and she headed boldly for Flint Channel.

Off Malmo the shorelights were dazzling, and it was extremely hard to fix a position. There were also many fishing boats about, each carrying two bright lights. Commander Goodhart ordered the boat to be trimmed down, with upper deck awash, and proceeded with one engine only, at 7 knots. He steadied his course through Flint Channel, passing at least twenty vessels with white lights,

and one making searchlight signals in the air. No sooner had these been avoided by changing course than a tramp came along, showing first a green light and then three white ones. She seemed to have anchored; but now two other vessels had to be dodged, and then the ship with the searchlight. Immediately afterwards, when just north-east of the lightship's three vertical red lights, E8 was viewed at last; a small torpedo boat sighted her as she was creeping by within 200 yards.

The hunt was up; the enemy showed red and green flares, and altered course to chase. E8 dived, and struck "very strong bottom" at 19 feet, and immediately afterwards at 14 feet. A succession of bumps brought her to a stop. It was 11.40 p.m. After an anxious quarter of an hour Commander Goodhart decided to rise to the surface. On his starboard quarter was the Drogden lightship, ahead of him a large destroyer or small cruiser—the ship which had been signalling with searchlight. She was only 200 yards away, but the commander trimmed his boat deep, and stole past. This took four minutes, and he then found another destroyer right ahead, and within 100 yards. He could but dive; the boat struck bottom at 16 feet heavily, carrying away all blades of the starboard propeller. The pursuers could be heard overhead.

Life was now a matter of minutes and feet. The boat was still moving; at 12.15 a.m. she was at 18 feet, and bumping badly; at 12.19 the commander stopped her and came silently to the surface. The destroyer was still close on his starboard beam, and in one minute he had dived again as slowly as he dared; mercifully the water deepened as E8 glided away. She seemed to be escaping; but at 2.10 a.m. she struck bottom again, and when she ventured up after an hour, there again was the destroyer on her port beam. Happily this time she got down without being seen, and when she came up again at 7.15 there was nothing in sight.

But the danger was not over yet. E8 was nearly out of breath; her battery was running very low. After diving again to avoid a steamer and afterwards a destroyer, Commander Goodhart decided to find a good depth, and lie at the bottom till darkness gave him a chance of recharging. For eight long hours E8 lay like a stone in 23 fathoms. When she came up three or four vessels were patrolling close by, and the moon was too bright. She tried again, but was again put down by a shadowy destroyer to the southward. At last, ten minutes before midnight, she found a bit of quiet sea where she could take breath.

But only for two hours; daylight comes early in northern waters. At 2 a.m. Commander Goodhart dived again, and lay long in 17 fathoms, spending his time in studying the chart. He was now well out of the Sound, and clear of the Swedish coast. Right ahead was the island of Bornholm, and if that could be passed successfully, the Baltic lay open beyond, a long voyage still, but a less crowded thoroughfare.

At 9 a.m. he came to the surface for three hours. By noon he was not far west of Ronne, and as he wished to make sure of getting past Bornholm unobserved, he decided to remain on the bottom till dark, then slip by and recharge his batteries for a long run north by daylight. By 7 p.m. he was on his way; by sunrise on the 21st he was passing the east coast of the great island of Gotland. At 9.2 p.m. he dived for a light cruiser, which passed over him; at 10 he returned to the surface and ran past the entrance to the Gulf of Riga and the island of Oesel. By 1 a.m. on August 22nd he had to dive for daylight, but at 3 he came up again, and ran ahead at full speed. At 8.30 a.m. on August 23rd he sighted Dagerort ahead, and joined Commander Max Horton in E9, passed with her and a Russian destroyer into the Gulf of Finland, and by 9 p.m. secured E8 in Reval harbour. Within twenty-four hours he had docked and overhauled her, replaced her broken propeller, and reported her ready for sea.

Of the warships sunk by E8 and her consorts, and of their blockade of the German traffic in the Baltic, there is no need to speak. Their feats of war, brilliant as they were, formed only a minor part of the glory of their intricate and perilous voyages in a hostile sea.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MERCANTILE MARINE AND FISHING FLEETS.

Among the great deeds of the war there is one which, though hardly to be described in detail, ranks in truth among the greatest of all. It is a collective deed: the conduct of the whole British Mercantile Marine and the Fishing Fleet—Services not less worthy than the professional Navy and Army to represent the "decent and dauntless people" of these islands. It had been prophesied before the war that after three ships had been sunk by enemy submarines no merchantman would put to sea. The prophet, though himself a naval man, can have known little of the resourcefulness of his own Service, and still less of the temper of his fellow-countrymen.

During the four years of the war, British commerce was never held up by any unwillingness of our seamen to face gun-fire or torpedo: skippers, engineers, and deck hands who had had three, four, or five ships sunk under them were constantly asking to be employed again before their clothes were dry. Seventeen thousand of them died in the 9,000,000 tons of shipping that we lost; yet not a man

among the survivors drew back. On the contrary, it must be recorded that the enemy owed much of his success to the habitual and imperturbable confidence of the British skipper in his own ship and his own judgment. The men of the Mercantile Marine and Fishing Fleets also took their full share in the work of defending our coasts and hunting down their lawless and cruel enemies; and in this work they showed every quality of a great Service. It was in no empty form of words that the King honoured the memory of "that great company of our men, who, though trained only to the peaceful traffic of the sea, yet in the hour of national danger gave themselves, with the ancient skill and endurance of their breed, to face new perils and new cruelties of war, and in a right cause served fearlessly to the end." Of this skill, endurance, and fearlessness, recorded in a thousand terse and unpretentious logs, an example or two may be picked almost at random.

In 1915, when the U-boat war was still a new experience, a sharp little double action was fought by two armed smacks, the *Boy Alfred* and the *I'll Try*, against two German submarines. The British boats were commanded by Skipper Walter S. Wharton and Skipper Thomas Crisp, and were out in the North Sea, when they sighted a pair of U-boats coming straight towards them on the surface. The first came within 300 yards of the *Boy Alfred* and stopped. Then followed an extraordinary piece of work, intelligible only to the German mind. The U-boat signalled with a flag to the *Boy Alfred* to come nearer, and at the same time opened fire upon her with rifles or a machine-gun, hitting her in many places, though by mere chance not a single casualty resulted.

Skipper Wharton's time had not yet come; he was neither for submission nor for a duel at long range; he risked all for a close fight. He first threw out his small boat, and by this encouraged the U-boat to approach nearer. She submerged and immediately reappeared within a hundred yards. A man then came out of the conning-tower and hailed the *Boy Alfred*, giving the order to abandon ship, as he intended to torpedo. But Skipper Wharton had now the range he desired—the hundred yards hammer and tongs range so dear to Nelson's gunners—and instead of "Abandon ship" he gave the order "Open fire." His man at the 12-pounder did not fail him; the first round was just short, and the second just over, but having straddled his target, the gunner put his third shot into the submarine's hull, just before the conning-tower, where it burst on contact. The fourth shot was better still: it pierced the conning-tower and burst inside. The U-boat, with her torpedo unfired, sank like a stone, and a significant wide-spreading patch of oil marked her grave.

In the meantime the second enemy had gone to the east of the *I'll Try*, who was herself east of the *Boy Alfred*. He was still more cautious than his companion, and remained submerged for some time, cruising around the *I'll Try* with only

a periscope showing. Skipper Crisp, having a motor fitted to his smack, was too handy for the German, and kept altering course so as to bring the periscope ahead of him, whenever it was visible. The enemy disappeared entirely no less than six times, but at last summoned up courage to break surface. His hesitation was fatal to him—he had given the smack time to make every preparation with perfect order and coolness. When he appeared suddenly at last, his upper deck and conning-tower were no sooner clearly exposed than Skipper Crisp put his helm hard over, brought the enemy on to his broadside, and opened fire with his 13-pounder gun. At this moment a torpedo passed under the smack's stern, missing only by 2 feet, then coming to the surface and running along past the *Boy Alfred*. It was the U-boat's first and last effort; in the same instant, the *I'll Try* fired her only shot. The shell struck the base of the conning-tower and exploded, blowing pieces of the submarine into the water on all sides.

The U-boat immediately took a list to starboard and plunged bows first; she disappeared so rapidly that the smack's gunner had not even time for a second blow. The *I'll Try* hurried to the spot, and there saw large bubbles of air coming up, and a wide and increasing patch of oil. She marked the position with a Dan buoy and stood by with the *Boy Alfred* for three-quarters of an hour. Finally, as the enemy gave no sign of life, the two smacks returned together to harbour. Their skippers were both rewarded for their excellent work; Skipper Wharton, who had already killed two U-boats and had received the D.S.C. and the D.S.M. with a bar, was now given a bar to the D.S.C. Skipper Crisp already had the D.S.M., and now received the D.S.C.

In another of these fishermen's fights it was the trawl itself which actually brought on the battle at close quarters and made victory possible. One day in February 1915 the trawler *Rosetta*, Skipper G. A. Novo, had gone out to fish, but she had on deck a 6-pounder gun ingeniously concealed. She joined a small fleet of four smacks and two steam trawlers some 45 miles out, and fished with them all night. Before dawn a voice was heard shouting out of the twilight: it came from one of the steam trawlers. "Cut your gear away, there's a submarine three-quarters of a mile away; he's sunk a smack and I have the crew on board." "All right, thank you," said Skipper Novo; but to get away from the enemy was precisely what he did not want to do. For some fifteen minutes he went on towing his trawl, in hope of being attacked; but as nothing happened, he thought he was too far away from the smacks, and began to haul up his trawl. He was bringing his boat round before the wind, and had all but the last twenty fathoms of the trawl in, when the winch suddenly refused to heave any more, and the warp ran out again about ten fathoms—a thing beyond all experience. "Hullo!" said the skipper, "there's something funny." He jumped down off the bridge and asked the mate what was the reason of the winch running back. "I don't know,

skipper; the stop-valve is opened out full." The skipper tried it himself; then went to the engine-man and asked him if full steam was on. "The steam's all right." "Then reverse winch!" said the skipper, and went to give a hand himself, as was his custom in a difficulty; the hauling went on this time, all but to the end.

Suddenly the mate gripped him by the arm. "Skipper, a submarine on board us." And there the enemy was, a bare hundred yards off on the starboard quarter. "Hard a-starboard, and a tick ahead!" shouted the skipper, and rushed for the gun, with the crew following. The gun was properly in charge of the mate, and he got to it first; but the brief dialogue which followed robbed him of his glory. "Right, skipper," he said, meaning thereby "This is my job." But in the same breath the skipper said "All right, Jack, I got him! you run on bridge and keep him astern." The *Rosetta's* discipline was good; the mate went like a man, and the skipper laid the gun.

He was justified by his success. The enemy was very quickly put out of action, being apparently left altogether behind by the hurricane energy of Skipper Novo. From the moment of breaking surface less than sixty seconds had gone by when the *Rosetta's* gun found the target. The U-boat was 250 feet long and only 300 feet away; every shot was a hit. The fourth caused an explosion, and flames shot up 4 or 5 feet above the submarine. Evidently she could no longer submerge, and she attempted to make off on the surface. But Skipper Novo was right in his estimate of his own chance—he had "got him." His fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth shots were all direct hits on the receding target, and at the eighth the enemy sank outright.

The *Rosetta* then spoke the smack *Noel*, which had been close to her during the action, and now confirmed all her observations. There was no doubt that the U-boat had been the obstruction which was tangled in the trawl. She had carried it all away, and in order to get clear had been obliged to come to the surface, without knowing where she might find herself, and there she had met her appropriate fate.

A third of these fights was a miniature fleet action, with an epic sound about it. In the Downs, and in the first twilight of a November morning, three of his Majesty's armed drifters—the *Present Help*, the *Paramount*, and the *Majesty*—were beginning their daily sweep for mines, when Skipper Thomas Lane of the *Present Help*, which was spare ship at the moment, sighted an object a mile distant to the eastward. As day was breaking, she was quickly marked for a German submarine—a huge one, with two big guns mounted on deck, one a 4-inch and one a 22-pounder. Nevertheless the *Present Help*, the *Paramount*, and the *Majesty* opened fire at once with their 6-pounders, not standing off, but closing their enemy, and continuing to close her under heavy fire, until they were hitting her with their own light guns. Even our history can hardly show a grander line of

battle than those three tiny ships bearing down upon their great antagonist; and although U48 did not fall to their fire, her surrender was due in the first instance to their determined onset.

It was the *Paramount* who took and gave the first knocks; her searchlight was shot away, and in reply she succeeded in putting one of the enemy's guns out of action. In the meantime, and none too soon, the *Present Help* had sent up the red rocket. It was seen by two other armed drifters, the *Acceptable* and the *Feasible*, who were less than 2 miles off, and by H.M.S. *Gipsy*, who was 4 miles away. Skipper Lee, of the *Acceptable*, immediately sang out "Action," and both boats blazed away at 3,000 yards range, getting in at least one hit on the enemy's conning-tower. At the same moment came the sound of the *Gipsy's* 12-pounder, as she rushed in at full speed.

The U-boat had started with an enormous and apparently overwhelming advantage of gun-power. She ought to have been a match, twice over, for all six of our little ships, but she was on dangerous ground, and the astounding resolution of the attack drove her off her course. In ten minutes the drifters had actually pushed her ashore on the Goodwin Sands—the *Paramount* had closed to 30 yards. Drake himself was hardly nearer to the Spanish galleons. Then came the *Gipsy*, equally determined. Her first two shots fell short, the third was doubtful, but after that she got on to the target, and the enemy's bigger remaining gun was no match for her 12-pounder. After two hits with common pointed shell, she put on eight out of nine lyddite shells, smashed the German's last gun and set him on fire forward. Thereupon the U-boat's crew surrendered and jumped overboard.

It was now 7.20 and broad daylight. Lieutenant-Commander Frederick Robinson, of the *Gipsy*, gave the signal to cease fire, and the five drifters set to work to save their drowning enemies. The *Paramount*, who was nearest, got thirteen, the *Feasible* one, and the *Acceptable* two. The *Gipsy's* whaler was got away, and her crew, under Lieutenant Gilbertson, R.N.R., tried for an hour to make headway against the sea, but could not go further than half a mile, the tide and weather being heavily against them. They brought back one dead man, and one prisoner in a very exhausted condition; afterwards they went off again and collected the prisoners from the other ships. Later came the procession back to port—a quiet and unobtrusive return, but as glorious as any that the Goodwins have ever seen. Full rewards followed, and the due decorations for Skippers Thomas Lane, Edward Kemp, and Richard William Barker. But their greatest honour was already their own—they had commanded in victorious action his

Majesty's armed drifters the *Present Help*, the *Paramount*, and the *Majesty*.

CHAPTER XXIX.
ZEEBRUGGE.

During the years 1916 and 1917 the Belgian ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend had become more and more important to the Germans as a base for their submarines. Their loss would be, as Admiral Scheer said, "a very disagreeable blow to the U-boat campaign." It was in November 1917 that the British Admiralty first planned a blow against these ports, but the favourable opportunity did not present itself until April 23, 1918. In the meantime, the Allies had succeeded in bringing the last German offensive to a standstill, and there was much anxiety as to its possible renewal. The blow struck by the Navy on St. George's Day was therefore a most timely one, for it not only increased Admiral Scheer's difficulties but resounded over the world as a daring feat of arms and a proof of unbroken national spirit.

The difficulties of the proposed attack were enormous, and real imagination was needed to cope with them. The coast was defended by batteries containing in all 120 heavy guns, some of them of 15-inch calibre. A battery of these was emplaced upon the Mole at Zeebrugge—a solid stone breakwater more than a mile long, which held also a railway terminus, a seaplane station, a number of large sheds for personnel and material, and, at the extreme seaward end, a lighthouse with searchlight and range-finder. The attacking force would also have to reckon with the batteries on shore, the troops who would reinforce the defenders on the Mole, and the destroyers which were lying in the harbour. It was not, of course, proposed to take and hold works so strongly defended; but an attack was indispensable, for the enemy's attention must be diverted from the block-ships, which were to arrive during the fight off both ports and sink themselves in such a position as to impede the passage of U-boats.

The offensive then was directed against Zeebrugge, and the plan of attack was to be the seizure of the Mole by a landing party. They must be strong enough to overrun it, capture the big guns, and keep off enemy reinforcements by destroying the railway viaduct which connected it with the shore. Then, when the block-ships had been sunk, the men must be re-embarked and brought away.

For the fighting itself there was little need to be over-anxious; the real problem was concerned with the difficulty of approaching, throwing the men ashore,

and getting them away again without the transports being sunk by the enemy's fire. Nothing could be left to luck or the inspiration of the moment, and the conditions of success were extremely severe. First, the attacking ships must effect a complete surprise, and reach the Mole before the guns of the defence could be brought to bear upon them. The enemy searchlights must therefore be blinded, as far as possible, by an artificial fog or smoke-screen; but again this must not be dense enough to obscure the approach entirely. Secondly, the work must be done in very short time, and to the minute, for though the attack might be a surprise, the return voyage must be made under fire. The shore batteries were known to have a destructive range of 16 miles; to get clear of the danger zone would take the flotilla two hours. Daylight would begin by 3.30 a.m.; it was therefore necessary to leave the Mole by 1.30; and as, for similar reasons, it was impossible to arrive before midnight, an hour and a half was all that the time-table could allow for fighting, blocking, and re-embarking. To do things as exactly as this, a night must be chosen when wind, weather, and tide would all be favourable. The difficulty of finding so precise an opportunity caused four months' delay—the expedition had in fact twice started and been compelled to put back: once it had actually come within 15 miles of the Mole.

The attack was conducted by Vice-Admiral Roger Keyes, commanding at Dover; the force employed was a large and composite one, and required masterly handling. The Ostend expedition, though highly difficult and dangerous, was an affair of blocking only, and was comparatively simple; but for Zeebrugge there were needed, besides the principal ships, a fleet of smoke-boats for making fog, motor launches for showing flares and bringing off men in difficulties, monitors for engaging the batteries, and destroyers for looking after the enemy ships in harbour; lastly, there was an old submarine, C3, to be used as a self-propelling mine for the destruction of the viaduct. The landing on the Mole was to be made from the *Vindictive* (Captain A. Carpenter), an old light cruiser of 5,720 tons, and she was to be accompanied by two old ferry-boats from the Mersey, the *Daffodil* and the *Iris*; the three destroyers were the *North Star* (Lieutenant-Commander K. C. Helyar), the *Phoebe* (Lieutenant-Commander H. E. Gore-Langton), and the *Warwick*, flying the Admiral's flag.

The success which resulted was due not to fortune but to foresight, and to the accurate timing of the work of the various units employed. As the flotilla advanced the smoke-screen craft and motor-boats dashed ahead, laid their screens, drove in the enemy ships, and made it possible for the transports to approach the Mole. The Ostend force parted company at the agreed point, and the monitors opened fire on the shore batteries. Precisely at midnight the *Sirius* and the *Brilliant* arrived at Ostend, and at Zeebrugge the *Vindictive*, emerging from the thick fog of smoke into the brilliant light of German flares, saw the end of the Mole

within 400 yards of her. She ran alongside at full speed, and returned the fire of the big guns with her 6-inch and 12-pound armament.

[image]

Zeebrugge.

To grapple the Mole was very difficult; the outer wall was high and there was a heavy swell rolling the ships. The *Iris* was ahead; but the *Daffodil*, being close astern of the *Vindictive*, was able to push her into place with her bows and hold her there most gallantly. The *Vindictive* ran out the "brows" or high gangways with which she was specially fitted, and the storming parties were ready to land. At this moment a shell fell among them and killed Colonel Bertram Elliot of the Marines, while Captain Henry Halanem, who was commanding the bluejackets, fell to machine-gun fire. But their men were unchecked. They rushed upon the brows, which were tossing and crashing on the wall, and with all their heavy accoutrements, bombs, and Lewis guns, cleared the leap down the steep fall to the floor of the Mole, and began fighting their way along it under cover of a barrage from the ship's howitzers. The *Iris* meantime was grappling the Mole farther ahead, with dearly bought success; the *Daffodil's* men jumped across to the *Vindictive* and joined her storming party.

The charge was irresistible; the batteries were taken, the dug-outs cleared, the hangars fired, the store-sheds blown up, and those of the enemy who escaped into a destroyer were sent to the bottom in her by a bombing attack from the parapet. All this was done in fifteen minutes; then followed a tremendous explosion at the shore end of the Mole. The C3, manned by half a dozen officers and men under Lieutenant R. D. Sandford, R.N., had made straight for the piles of the viaduct under the searchlights of the enemy, who seem to have thought that she was bent on passing through to attack the ships in the harbour, and was therefore sure to be trapped among the struts and piles. Then, when they saw her crew reappear in a tiny motor-boat they opened fire with machine-guns; but they had only wounded and not disabled their quarry, for immediately C 3 exploded and destroyed the viaduct and all upon it, cutting off the Mole from communication with the shore. Lieutenant R. D. Sandford, with his five companions, was picked up by a steam pinnace commanded by his brother, Lieutenant-Commander Sandford, and brought away safely. Both as tactics and as a moral reinforcement their exploit was of the highest value.

Ten minutes afterwards the block-ships, the *Thetis* (Commander R. S. Sneyd), the *Intrepid* (Lieutenant Stuart Bonham-Carter), and the *Iphigenia* (Lieu-

tenant V. W. Billyard-Leake), were seen rounding the lighthouse and heading for the entrance of the canal. The *Thetis* was leading, and received the concentrated fire of the enemy; she ran aground on the edge of the channel and was sunk partially across it, signalling to her consorts, as she went down, to avoid the nets which had fouled her own propeller. The *Intrepid* and the *Iphigenia* thereupon passed straight up the canal to a point at which they were two or three hundred yards inside the shore lines and actually behind the German guns on the Mole. They were then blown up and sunk across the channel, and their crews took to the boats and got away out to sea, where they were eventually taken on board the destroyers.

An hour had now passed and the work was done. Even the lighthouse had been sacked, for Wing-Commander Brock, who was in charge of the smoke-screen operations, had not only led the charge into the big gun battery, but had made a special objective of the range-finder in the lighthouse top and came down laden with an armful of spoil. He was last seen lying desperately wounded under the parapet wall of the Mole; but this was not reported until afterwards, and his fate remained uncertain. The siren was shrieking the recall, half drowned by the noise of gun-fire; it was twenty minutes before the word could be given to cast off.

The *Vindictive*, the *Iris*, and the *Daffodil* got away at full speed, and the German salvos followed them with remarkable regularity, but always a few yards behind; the ships were soon covered too by their own smoke. Of the three destroyers two came safely off; the third, the *North Star*, was sunk by gun-fire near the block-ships, but her men were brought away by the *Phoebe*. Of the motor-boats (under command of Captain R. Collins) many performed feats of incredible audacity at point-blank range, and all but two returned. The co-operation of all forces was from first to last beyond expectation and beyond praise; a mortal enterprise could hardly come nearer to perfection, whether of foresight, daring, or execution.

During the Zeebrugge attack the wind shifted and blew the smoke off shore. This helped to cover the retirement, but at Ostend it caused a partial failure of the blocking operations. Commodore Hubert Lynes successfully laid his smoke screen, and sent in the *Sirius* and the *Brilliant* to be sunk between the piers of the harbour mouth. But the enemy sighted and sunk the motor-boats and their guide lights; the block-ships missed the entrance and were blown up 2,000 yards to the east. The Germans, to guard against a renewal of the attempt, removed the buoy at the entrance and kept a patrol of nine destroyers in the harbour. But on the night of 9th May, Commodore Lynes took in a larger flotilla, and this time the *Vindictive* herself was the block-ship. In spite of fog and darkness her commander (Godsal, late of the *Brilliant*), piloted by Acting-Lieutenant Cockburn in a motor-

boat, ran her 200 yards up the channel and then ordered her to be sunk. He died in the act, but the work was completed by Lieutenant Crutchley and Engineer-Lieutenant Bury. The losses were heavy, for the Germans had a fair target; but even when day broke the nine destroyers made no attempt at a counterstroke, and the expedition returned triumphant.

This whole attack was a legitimate enterprise planned only for a definite and practical purpose, but in the result it proved a greater affair than had been foreseen: the moral effect of so splendid a feat of arms came as a timely gift from the Navy to the Allied cause.

PART V.

BEHIND THE LINES.

CHAPTER XXX.

BEHIND THE LINES AND AT HOME.

"We are fighting," said Lord Curzon in July 1918, "seven distinct campaigns ourselves—in France, Italy, Salonika, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt, and we have raised 7,000,000 men. We have been the feeder, clothier, baker, armourer, and universal provider of the Allies."

The achievement of Britain in the war cannot be judged only from her successes in the field. In 1914 she set herself resolutely to prepare a great fighting-machine which would not only be superior to that of Germany, but which would also serve the needs of all the Powers who fought by her side. It was the perfection of this machine, built up through four patient and laborious years, which enabled her in the final war of movement to deliver the succession of blows which led to victory.

Take first the numbers of enlisted men. In August 1914 the British land forces were made up of 250,000 Regulars, 200,000 trained Reserves, and 250,000 partly-trained Territorials. Lord Kitchener asked for 100,000 volunteers, and these were enrolled in less than a fortnight. In one day 30,000 enlisted. By July 1915 there were 2,000,000 men in arms. In May 1916 the King announced that

over 5,000,000 men had enrolled voluntarily in the army and the navy. In August 1918, 8,500,000 men were enrolled in the armed forces of the Crown.

The navy, in August 1914, had 145,000 officers and men and a tonnage of 2,500,000. Four years later the figures were 450,000 men and 8,000,000 tons. In one month in the year 1918 British warships travelled 1,000,000 sea miles in home waters alone, and in the same period auxiliary vessels travelled 6,000,000 miles, or 250 times the circuit of the globe. During the war the British navy transported 20,000,000 men, of whom only 2,700 were lost by enemy action; 2,000,000 horses and mules, 25,000,000 tons of explosives, 51,000,000 tons of oil and fuel, and 130,000,000 tons of food and other materials. All this was done while fighting a constant warfare against enemy submarines.

The work of the British people at home in supplying munitions was one of the main factors in the enemy's defeat. The Ministry of Munitions was formed in June 1915, and soon became the largest of the Government departments, controlling the iron, steel, engineering, and chemical trades, and employing 2,500,000 men and 1,000,000 women. Over 10,000 firms worked for it, and Government factories increased from three in 1914 to 200 in 1918. In 1918 the figure of the first year of war in the production of certain classes of ammunition was multiplied four hundred times, and in the production of guns forty times. During the Battle of the Somme in 1916, Britain issued every week to her armies in France an amount of ammunition equal to the entire stock available for her land service at the outbreak of war; and during the last battles of 1918 the volume of shells fired was more than double that expended in the Battle of the Somme. All the railways of Britain were taken over by the State, and from October 1916 materials for thousands of miles of track, over 1,000 locomotives, and many thousands of wagons were shipped to various theatres of war, in spite of the fact that more than 170,000 railwaymen had been released for service with the army.

[image]

FIELD-MARSHAL EARL KITCHENER.

The business of an army in the field is not merely to fight, or rather, its chief task, fighting, is only possible if there is a first-class organization behind the lines. How brilliant and complete that organization was towards the close of the struggle would take a volume to expound. In France, for example, the British Army had its own Forestry Department, and produced from French forests over 2,000,000 tons of timber. It was its own farmer, and in 1918 it saved the crops of 18,000 French acres, harvesting them at night. It did its own tailoring and boot-

making. It did all its mending of every kind, and it saved broken and derelict material to be remade in the factories at home. It did its own catering, and there never was a war in which men and horses were better fed—a remarkable feat when we remember that provision had to be made for men of different races and tastes—curry for the Indians, nut-oil for the Chinese, and coffee for the American soldiers. It did its own banking, insurance, and printing. Its transport service was a miracle. In 1914 the Expeditionary Force landed in France with 40,000 horses and a few hundred lorries, while its railway transport was managed by the French. In 1918 it ran its own railways, and it had 500,000 horses and mules, 33,500 lorries, 1,400 tractors, and 15,800 motor-cars. It did the business of almost all the trades on earth, and did it with exactness, economy, and an amazing flexibility, so that whenever a new call was necessitated by the strategy of the generals, it was fully and promptly met.

The war was therefore a united effort of the whole British people. In Cromwell's day the start of one battle was delayed because it got mixed up with a fox hunt. Even in the Napoleonic wars there were thousands of families in England which lived remote from the struggle, and readers of Jane Austen's novels would not gather from their placid narrative that her country was involved in a European campaign. But between 1914 and 1918 every aspect of national life and every branch of national thought was organized for the purposes of the war. Hospitals sprang up in every town and in hundreds of country districts. Articles of food were controlled to release shipping for war purposes. The country enormously increased its own food supply, and some 4,000,000 acres of pasture were brought under tillage. The whole nation was rationed, so that rich and poor alike shared in the sacrifice. Schoolboys spent their holidays working on the land, and the women of Britain, in munition factories, in land work, and in a thousand other employments, made noble contribution to the common cause. In 1918 there were at least 1,500,000 more women working than before the war, and the tasks on which they were engaged were those which had hitherto been regarded as work which could only be performed by men.

PART VI.

VICTORY.

CHAPTER XXXI.
THE LAST DAY.

By the first days of November 1918 the war was won. In October both Turkey and Bulgaria had been beaten to the ground. On the 4th of November Austria capitulated. Ludendorff had resigned, the German Emperor had sought refuge at Army Headquarters from the troubles of his capital, the German navy had mutinied, and a revolution was beginning in Berlin. Foch was on the eve of his last step in the West. The Americans were moving on Sedan. Haig was in the position of Wellington on the eve of Waterloo, when he raised his hat as a signal for "Everything to go in."

On 1st November Valenciennes fell. On 4th November Haig attacked on the 30 miles between that city and the Sambre. Twenty British divisions scattered thirty-two German divisions, taking 19,000 prisoners and more than 450 guns. That day broke the enemy's resistance. Henceforth he was not in retreat but in flight, and the two wings of his armies were separated for ever. There remained only the 50 miles between Avesnes and Mezières as an avenue of escape for all the German forces of the south, and Foch was preparing to swing his right wing north of Metz to close the last bolt-hole. If a negotiated armistice did not come within a week there would be a compulsory armistice of complete collapse and universal surrender. That day Germany appointed delegates to sue for peace.

On the 8th, Rawlinson occupied Avesnes and Byng reached the skirts of Maubeuge. The first week of that month of November the weather was wet and chilly, very different from the bright August when British troops had last fought in that region. The old regular forces which in 1914 had then borne the shock of Germany's first fury had mostly disappeared. Many were dead, or prisoners, or crippled for life, and the rest had been dispersed through the whole British army. The famous first five divisions, which had made the Retreat from Mons, were in the main composed of new men. But there were some who had fought steadily from the Sambre to the Marne and back again to the Aisne, and then for four years in bitter trench battles, and had now returned, after our patient fashion, to their old campaigning ground. Even the slow imagination of the British soldier must have been stirred by that strange revisiting. Then he had been marching south in stout-hearted bewilderment, with the German cavalry pricking at his flanks. Now he was sweeping to the north-east on the road to Germany, and far ahead his own cavalry and cyclists were harassing the enemy rout, while on all the eastern roads his aircraft were scattering death.

On the 7th the line of the Scheldt broke. On the 8th Condé fell, and on the

9th the British Guards entered Maubeuge. On the 7th Pershing and the Americans had reached Sedan. On the 10th the British left was approaching Mons, and the centre was close on the Belgian frontier. These were feverish days both for victors and vanquished. Surrender hung in the air, and there was a generous rivalry among the Allies to get as far forward as possible before it came. Take, for example, the 8th Division of the British First Army. On the 10th November one of its battalions, the 2nd Middlesex, travelled for seven hours in buses, and then marched 27 miles, pushing the enemy before them. They wanted to reach the spot near Mons where some of them had fired some of the first British shots in the war; and it is pleasant to record that they succeeded.

[image]

The Front in July on the eve of the Allied Offensive, and on the day of the Armistice, November 11, 1918.

Meantime, in Germany, the revolution had begun. On Saturday the 9th, a republic was declared in Berlin, and throughout the country, in every State, the dynasties fell. On Sunday the 10th, the Emperor left the Army Headquarters at Spa, crossed the Dutch frontier, and sought refuge in a friend's house at Amerongen. The Imperial Crown Prince, like his father, found sanctuary in Holland. The German delegates left Berlin on the afternoon of Wednesday the 6th, and on the 8th met Foch and petitioned for an armistice. They received his terms, and communicated them to Spa and Berlin. On the night of Sunday, 10th November, the terms were accepted, and at 5 o'clock on the morning of Monday, 11th November, the armistice was signed. The acceptance of the terms meant the surrender of Germany to the will of the Allies, for they stripped from her the power of continuing or renewing the war. It was an admission of her utter defeat in the field.

The morning of Monday, 11th November, was cold and foggy, such weather as the year before had been seen at Cambrai. The Allied front was for the most part quiet, only cavalry patrols moving eastwards in touch with the retreat. But at two points there was some activity. The Americans on the Meuse were advancing, and the day opened for them with all the accompaniment of a field action. At Mons, on the Sunday night, the Canadians were in position round the place, fighting continued during the night, and at dawn the 3rd Canadian Division entered the streets and established a line east of the town, while the carillons of the belfries played "Tipperary." For Britain the circle was now complete. In three months her armies had gained seven victories, each greater than any in her old

wars; they had taken some 190,000 prisoners and 3,000 guns, and they had broken the heart of their enemy. To their great sweep from Amiens to Mons was due especially the triumph which Foch had won, and on that grey November morning their worn ranks could await the final hour with thankfulness and pride.

The minutes passed slowly along the front. An occasional shell, an occasional burst of fire, told that peace was not yet, but there were long spells of quiet, save in the American area. Officers had their watches in their hands, and the troops waited with the same grave composure with which they had fought. Men were too weary for their imaginations to rise to the great moment, for it is not at the time of a crisis, but long afterwards, that the human mind grasps the drama. Suddenly, as the watch-hands touched 11, there came a second of expectant silence, and then a curious rippling sound which observers, far behind the front, likened to the noise of a great wind. It was the sound of men cheering from the Vosges to the sea.

CHAPTER XXXII.
LOOKING BACKWARD.

The greatness of the contest is not easy to realize, for it was so much the hugest war ever fought in the history of humanity that comparative tests fail us. During its four years it took from the world a far heavier toll of life and wealth than a century of the old Barbarian invasions had done. More than 8,000,000 men died in battle, and the casualties on all fronts were over 30,000,000. If we add deaths from disease and famine it cannot have cost the population of the globe less than 20,000,000 dead, and as many more maimed and weakened for life. At least 40,000 millions sterling of money were spent by the nations in the direct business of war. Let it be remembered that this devastation was wrought not in the loose society of an elder world, but in one where each state was a highly-developed thing, and depended for some necessaries upon its neighbour, and where myriads of human souls could only support life so long as the machine of civilization performed its functions smoothly and securely.

We can best grasp the immensity of the struggle by attempting to grasp the immensity of the battleground. Such a task is for the imagination only, for the soldier saw only his little area, and no man's first-hand experience could cover all the many fields. An observer on some altitude in the north, like the Hill of

Cassel, on some evening in September 1918, could look east and note the great arc from the dunes at Nieuport to the coalfields about Lens lit with the flashes of guns and the glare of star-shells, and loud with the mutter of battle. That was a line of 50 miles—far greater than any battlefield in the old wars. Had he moved south to the ridge of Vimy he would have looked on another 50 miles of an intenser strife. South, again, to Bapaume, he would have marked the wicked glow from Cambrai to the Oise. Still journeying, from some little height between the Oise and the Aisne he would have scanned the long front which was now creeping round the shattered woods of St. Gobain to where Laon sat on its hill. From the mounts about Rheims he might have seen Gouraud's battle-line among the bleak Champagne downs, and from a point in the Argonne the trenches of the Americans on both sides of the Meuse, running into the dim wooded country where the Moselle flowed towards Metz. Past the Gap of Nancy, and southward along the scarp of the Vosges, went the flicker of fire and the murmur of combat, till the French lines stretched into the plain of Alsace, and exchanged greetings with the sentinels on the Swiss frontier. Such a battle-ground might well have seemed beyond the dream of mortals, and yet it was but part of the whole.

A celestial intelligence, with sight unlimited by distance, would have looked eastward, and, beyond the tangle of the Alps, witnessed a strange sight. From the Stelvio Pass in the Alps to the Adriatic ran another front, continuous through glacier-camps and rock-eyries and trenches on the edge of the eternal snows, to the foothills of the Lombard plain, and thence, by the gravel beds of the Piave, to the lagoons of Venice. Beyond the Adriatic it ran, through the sombre hills of Albania, past the great lakes, where the wild-fowl wheeled at the unfamiliar sound of guns, beyond the Tcherna and Vardar and Struma valleys to the Ægean shores. It began again, when the Anatolian peninsula was left behind, and curved from the Palestine coast in a great loop north of Jerusalem across Jordan to the hills of Moab. Gazing over the deserts, he would have marked the flicker which told of mortal war passing beyond the ancient valleys of Euphrates and Tigris, up into the wild Persian ranges. And scattered flickers to the north would have led him to the Caspian shores, and beyond them to that tableland running to the Hindu Kush which was the cradle of all the warring races. Still farther north, his eyes would have seen the lights of the Allies from the Pacific coast westward to the Urals and the Volga, and little clusters far away on the shore of the Arctic Sea.

Had the vision of our celestial spectator been unhindered by time as well as by space, it would have embraced still stranger sights. It would have beheld the old Allied Eastern front, from the Baltic to the Danube, pressing westward, checking, and falling east; breaking in parts, gathering strength, and again advancing; and at last dying like a lingering sunset into darkness. Behind would have ap-

peared a murderous glow, which was the flame of revolution. Turning to Africa, it would have noted the slow movement of little armies in west, and east, and south—handfuls of men creeping in wide circles among the Cameroons forests till the land was theirs; converging lines of mounted troopers among the barrens of the German South-West territory, closing in upon the tin shanties of Windhoek; troops of all races advancing through the mountain glens and dark green forests of German East Africa, till, after months and years, the enemy strength had become a batch of exiles beyond the southern frontier. And farther off still, among the isles of the Pacific and on the Chinese coast, it would have seen men toiling under the same lash of war.

Had the spectator looked seaward, the sight would have been not less marvellous. On every ocean of the world he would have observed the merchantmen of the Allies bringing supplies for battle. But in the North Atlantic, in the Mediterranean, and in the English Channel and the North Sea he would have seen uncanny things. Vessels would disappear as if by magic, and little warships would hurry about like some fishing fleet when shoals are moving. The merchantmen would huddle into packs, with destroyers like lean dogs at their sides. He would have seen in the Scottish firths and among the isles of the Orkneys a mighty navy waiting, and ships from it scouring the waters of the North Sea, while inside the fences of Heligoland lay the decaying monsters of the German fleet. And in the air, over land and sea would have been a perpetual coming and going of aircraft like flies above the pool of war.

The observer, wherever on the globe his eyes were turned, would have found no area immune from the effects of the contest. Every factory in Europe and America was humming by night and day to prepare the material of strife. The economic problems of five continents had been transformed. The life of the remotest villages had suffered a strange transformation. Far-away English hamlets were darkened because of air raids; little farms in Touraine, in the Scottish Highlands, in the Apennines, were untilled because there were no men; Armenia had lost half her people; the folk of North Syria were dying of famine; Indian villages and African tribes had been blotted out by plague; whole countries had ceased for the moment to exist, except as geographical names. Such were but a few of the consequences of the kindling of war in a world grown too expert in destruction, a world where all nations were part one of another.

The war was an Allied victory, but let us be very clear what that means. It delivered the world's freedom from a deadly danger, and, though the price was colossal, the cause was worthy. But its positive fruits must be sought elsewhere—in that impulse to international brotherhood caused by the revulsion from the

horrors of international strife, and the war's vindication of the essential greatness of our common humanity. Its hero was the ordinary man. Victory was won less by genius in the few than by faithfulness in the many.

The horrors of the four years sickened the world of war, and made thinking men realize that some other way than this monstrous folly must be found of settling disputes between peoples. A League of Nations was one of the first articles of peace, and the League then founded has already, in spite of hindrances and setbacks, and the opposition of an all too narrow patriotism, made itself a power in the world. If civilization is to endure the League must prosper, for the world cannot stand another such carnival of destruction. The League means the enforcement of law throughout the globe, so that the nations as regards each other shall live in that state of orderly liberty which a civilized power ensures for its citizens. That purpose, as we have learned from bitter experience, is not a dream of idealism, but the first mandate of common-sense.

No honest sacrifice can be made in vain. In war sacrifice is mainly of the innocent and the young. This was true of every side. Most men who fell died for honourable things. They were inspired by the eternal sanctities—love of country and home, comradeship, loyalty to manly virtues, the indomitable questing of youth. Against such a spirit the gates of death cannot prevail. We may dare to hope that the seed sown in sacrifice and pain will yet quicken and bear fruit to the purifying of the world, and in this confidence await the decrees of that Omnipotence to whom a thousand years are as one day.

THE END.

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