

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

The Daily Telegraph

WAR BOOKS

HACKING THROUGH BELGIUM

The Daily Telegraph

WAR BOOKS

HOW THE WAR BEGAN

By W. L. COURTNEY, LL.D., and J. M. KENNEDY.

THE FLEETS AT WAR

By ARCHIBALD HURD.

THE CAMPAIGN OF SEDAN

By GEORGE HOOPER

THE CAMPAIGN ROUND LIEGE

By J. M. KENNEDY.

IN THE FIRING LINE: Stories of Actual Fighting
by the Men who Fought. By A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK.

GREAT BATTLES OF THE WORLD

By STEPHEN CRANE, Author of "The Red Badge
of Courage."

THE RED CROSS IN WAR

By Miss M. F. BILLINGTON.

FORTY YEARS AFTER: The Story of the
Franco-German War. By H. C. BAILEY, with
Introduction by W. L. COURTNEY, LL.D.

A SCRAP OF PAPER: The Inner History
of German Diplomacy. By Dr. E. J. DILLON.

HOW THE NATIONS WAGED WAR

By J. M. KENNEDY.

BRITISH REGIMENTS AT THE FRONT

The Glorious Story of their Battle Honours.

HACKING THROUGH BELGIUM

By EDMUND DANE.

AIRCRAFT IN WAR

By ERIC S. BRUCE.

FAMOUS FIGHTS OF INDIAN NATIVE REGIMENTS

By REGINALD HODDER.

THE RETREAT TO PARIS

By ROGER INGPEN.

MOTOR TRANSPORT IN WAR

By HORACE WYATT.

THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE

By MARR MURRAY.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

D1.79h

HACKING THROUGH BELGIUM

5-17066-
11-11
LIBRARY

BY
EDMUND DANE

135-986
23/3/11

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

MCMXIV

PREFATORY NOTE

IT is the purpose of this book to show the great part played at a crisis in European history by a little People; the signal bravery of their decision; the vital importance, from a military standpoint, of their valiant defence of their Fatherland; and the moral effect in the struggle of that love of liberty which in the face of a devastation unparalleled in western Europe since the seventeenth century, has left their spirit unsubdued. Incomplete though at this juncture the record must be, the British people may be helped by it the more fully to appreciate the sacrifices made by the Belgians for those ideals of ordered independence and freedom on which the greatness of our own Empire has been reared; ideals whose reality has been tested and not found wanting in the fiery trial of war.



COPYRIGHT, SPECIALLY PREPARED FOR The Daily Telegraph by GEOGRAPHIA, LTD.

Hacking Through Belgium

CHAPTER I

THE "SCRAP OF PAPER"

AT seven o'clock on the evening of Sunday, August 2, the German Minister at Brussels presented to the Belgian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs the Note from his Government demanding as an Act of "friendly neutrality" a free passage through Belgium for the German armies forming the main part of the expeditionary forces against France.

The Note promised to respect the independence and integrity of Belgium at the conclusion of peace. It asked for the temporary surrender, on military grounds, of the fortress of Namur. In the event of refusal, the Note added, Germany would be compelled to treat Belgium as an enemy. Twelve hours were given to the Belgian Government to reply.

The Belgian Cabinet were called together.

8 Hacking Through Belgium

During those fateful hours the whole future of their country hung in the balance. Compliance with the demand meant that Belgium must sink to a dependency of the German Empire. If in the great War, already opened by Germany's declaration on July 31 of hostilities against Russia, Germany prevailed, as the passive help of Belgium would assist her most materially to prevail, Belgium, in effect an ally of Germany, would be forced to look to Germany for protection, and to accept the conditions, whatever they might be, on which that protection would be given. In any event, that protection would afford an excuse for a continued, perhaps indefinite, occupation by German troops. That implied, forms apart, the annexation of Belgium. Forms apart, it implied the introduction of Prussian methods and Prussian rule. The native genius of Belgium read, in the brief and peremptory demand from Berlin, a destiny which would reduce 600 years' struggle for freedom to naught.

Not easy is it to measure the anxiety of that Sunday night during which King Albert and his Ministers weighed their decision. Few meetings of statesmen have been more memorable or more momentous. Of the aims of Germany there could be no doubt. On

April 18, 1832, Prussia with Austria had attached her signature to that Guarantee of the neutrality and independence of Belgium which France and Great Britain had already signed, and which Russia signed sixteen days after the acquiescence of the Germanic Powers. By the Treaty of London in 1839, after the settlement of the Luxemburg question between Belgium and Holland the Guarantee was solemnly ratified. In the meantime Germany had come to believe in what Count von Moltke the elder called "the oldest of all rights, the right of the strongest." Almost coincidentally with the presentation of the Note at Brussels the German Chancellor at Berlin was, in conversation with the British Ambassador, describing the Guarantee as "a scrap of paper." Treaties and engagements are certainly scraps of paper, just as promises are no more than breaths. But upon such scraps of paper and breaths the fabric of civilisation has been built, and without them its everyday activity would come to an end.

Of what value then was the promise embodied in the Ultimatum?

The promise had no value. Glance at the map of Belgium. It will be seen that the fortress of Namur is as nearly as possible the geographical centre of the country. What

10 Hacking Through Belgium

would be the substance of Belgian independence if, by "the oldest of all rights," that strong place was kept by Germany presumably as a barrier against France; actually as the central base of an occupation? Belgian independence would be a shadow.

In their extremity King Albert and his Ministers turned to Great Britain. They had good reason. The independence of modern Belgium is the work of British statesmanship. Great Britain had, in 1831, initiated the Guarantee although France was the first Power to sign it, and Great Britain had always looked upon the Guarantee as a solemn obligation. "We are bound to defend Belgium," Lord John (then Earl) Russell said in the House of Lords in explaining the policy of the Government in 1870. "I am told that may lead us into danger. I deny that any great danger would exist if the country manfully declared her intention to stand by her treaties, and not to shrink from the performance of her engagements. When the choice is between infamy and honour, I cannot doubt that her Majesty's Government will pursue the course of honour; the only one worthy of the British people. The main thing is how we can assure Belgium, assure Europe, and assure the world that the great name we have acquired by the

constant observation of truth and justice shall not be departed from, and that we shall be in the future what we have been in the past."

Without distinction of party that embodies the consistent attitude British Ministers have taken up since the Guarantee was signed. It proved, without distinction of party, to be the resolve of British statesmen and the British people still. In the exchange of despatches which took place between Brussels and London during this critical sitting of the Belgian Cabinet, one thing at any rate was clear. The undivided might and authority of Great Britain and her Empire was, come what may, to be cast on the side of international right and on the side of freedom. When the early light of that summer morning broke upon their deliberations the Belgian Ministry had made up their mind. The dawn after such a night symbolised the colours of their flag—through darkness and trial to liberty. They would face the worst. At 4 a.m. their answer was in the hands of the German Minister waiting to receive it. It was: "No."

The attack on the neutrality of Belgium, the reply declared, would be a flagrant violation of the rights of nations. To agree to the proposal of Germany meant a sacrifice

12 Hacking Through Belgium

of national honour. By every possible means Belgium was resolved to resist aggression.*

Any other answer was impossible. That

* The text of the Belgian Government's reply was as follows :—

By its Note of August 2, 1914, the German Government makes it known that according to its certain information the French forces have had the intention of marching upon the Meuse by way of Givet and Dinant, and that Belgium, notwithstanding her good intention, would not be in a condition to repel without assistance an advance march of the French troops.

The German Government feels itself under the obligation to prevent that attack and to violate Belgian territory. Under these circumstances Germany proposes to the King's Government to adopt in reference to her a friendly attitude, and engages at the moment of peace to guarantee the integrity of the kingdom and its possessions in all their extent.

The Note adds that if Belgium puts difficulties in the way of the forward movement of the German troops, Germany will be obliged to consider her as an enemy, and leave the final settlement between the two States, one with the other, to the decision of arms.

This Note has provoked in the King's Government a profound and grievous astonishment.

The intentions it attributes to France are in contradiction with the formal declarations which have been made to us on August 1 in the name of the Government of the Republic.

Moreover, if, contrary to our expectation, a violation of Belgian neutrality should come to be made by France, Belgium would fulfil all her international duties and her army would oppose to the invader the most vigorous resistance.

The Treaties of 1839, confirmed by the Treaties of 1870, consecrate the independence and neutrality of Belgium under the guarantee of the Powers, and notably under that of his Majesty the King of Prussia.

Belgium has ever been faithful to her international obligations; she has accomplished her duties in a spirit of loyal impartiality; she has neglected no effort to maintain her neutrality and to have it respected.

The attempt upon her independence which the German Government threatens would constitute a flagrant viola-

fact, however, does not detract from the splendid bravery of the refusal. The Belgians have paid a high price for freedom. Ever since commerce and the arts found there their first foothold in Northern Europe, the flourishing cities and fertile fields of Belgium have been the lodestar of political adventurers and needy despoilers. They have been the sport of intrigues and royal marriages. They have been fought for by Burgundian, Spaniard, Austrian, Frenchman, Dutchman, and German. But throughout their chequered history the spirit of freedom, and the hope of shaping their own destinies was never crushed out.

In 1832 a new era began. This land, a marvel of human industry, where beautiful cities rich in monuments of art and devotion

tion of the rights of nations. No strategic consideration justifies violation of right.

Were it to accept the propositions that have been put to it, the Belgian Government would sacrifice the honour of the nations and at the same time go back on its duties towards Europe.

Conscious of the part that Belgium has played for more than eighty years in the world's civilisation, it refuses to believe that the independence of Belgium can be preserved only at the price of violation of her neutrality.

If that hope is ill-founded, the Belgian Government is firmly resolved to repel by every means in its power any attempt upon its right.

England agrees to co-operate as guarantor in the defence of our territory. The English Fleet will assure the free passage of the Scheldt for the revictualling of Antwerp.

14 Hacking Through Belgium

had sprung up amid ancient swamps; a land turned by patient labour from a desolation into a garden, was at length assured of peace. It was happy in the choice of public-spirited rulers. With unsparing energy and devotion to the common good, Leopold the First threw himself into the work of repairing the heavy ravages of war. He promoted the first railway on the Continent of Europe. He encouraged industry and education. He fostered commerce. Under his wise government the roads of Belgium became the best in Europe. The navigable waterways and canals were improved until they reached a total of over 1,000 miles. The rich mineral resources of the country were opened up. The work thus begun by the first King of the Belgians has been continued by his successors. No record of public spirit and public service has added greater lustre to a Royal House. "The people of Belgium," said an English statesman, "have been governed with wisdom, with fairness, and with due regard to their national character, and they reward such treatment by devoted loyalty to their king and firm attachment to their constitution."

The decision now taken still to put freedom first meant undoing all the results laboriously won during nearly eighty years of

tranquillity. Yet neither King Albert nor his Ministers wavered. And the Belgian people were as firm as they. With Englishmen the love of liberty is commonly passive. They feel their freedom to be secure. Only when challenged does their love of freedom flame into passion. But the Belgians know that their freedom lives under challenge. The shadow of Prussian conscription lay athwart their door. That iron and materialistic system which takes its steady toll of a country's manhood, and crushes national spirit like a Chinese boot, has been the dread of Belgium, as it has been the dread of Holland for a generation. It was not forgotten that the designs of Prussia upon Belgium were no idea of yesterday. More than five months elapsed before diplomatic pressure brought Prussia in 1832 to put her name to the "scrap of paper" she has now repudiated. Count von Moltke made a special study of Belgium and Holland as of Poland. The inference is obvious. Had it not been for the firm front shown by Great Britain in 1870, the German occupation of Belgium would long ago have been an accomplished fact.

In 1870 Prussia did not feel herself strong enough to face France and Great Britain alone. Elated by the unexpected results of the war of 1870, and attributing them wholly

16 Hacking Through Belgium

to her own prowess instead of largely to the unpreparedness of France, her designs against the Netherlands were revived. Not France was the obstacle feared, but Great Britain. If we are to seek for the true reason of the anti-British spirit fostered in Germany, and certainly not discountenanced by official influence, it will be found in Great Britain standing in the way of this design. Colonies and *welt-politik* were the open talk of Pan-Germanism, but expansion east and west on the Continent of Europe was the definite objective of the plans so minutely prepared at Berlin; and of the costly and extensive apparatus of espionage spread like a network over Europe. This was the dream of riches before the eyes of the German subaltern as he ate the meal of a few pence which his "Spartan poverty" compelled him to take in a cheap café, and puzzled how to live without falling into debt.

We need not search far for evidence. If the reader looks at the map of western Germany he will see that a bunch of railway-lines stretch to half a dozen points of the compass east of Aix-la-Chapelle like the extended fingers of a hand. They link Aix with eastern, northern, and southern Germany. Now Aix is not a great commercial centre. It is merely a watering-place. There

is no more reason why Aix should be a huge railway-centre with vast sidings, and miles of platforms than, say, Wiesbaden. But these are not commercial railways. So far as ordinary traffic goes their construction represents almost a dead loss.

The railways are military and strategical. Regarding their construction one or two interesting facts have to be noted. The first is that their construction began just after the Boer War broke out; was almost coincident indeed with the famous telegram of the Kaiser on British reverses. The second fact is that the surveys, plans, and estimates for these railways must have been made long before, and been waiting in a pigeon-hole for a convenient opportunity.

Now ever since the days of the Great Elector Frederick William the affairs of Prussia have been administered with an economy which might almost be called parsimony. It is utterly foreign to Prussian spirit and tradition to spend millions of money without very good reason for it. Remarkably enough, another bunch of these railways, equally without ordinary traffic, converge upon the frontier of Holland.

Just as Scharnhorst was the inventor of the German universal service system, and von Hindersin the organiser of their artillery, so

18 Hacking Through Belgium

von Moltke was perhaps the first military man who appreciated thoroughly the importance of railways in war, and their value in that rapid hurling of masses of troops into a hostile country before its defence can be put upon a war-footing, which is the cornerstone of German strategy.

No doubt, then, can be entertained as to the true object of these railway enterprises. That they were not undertaken until it was believed Great Britain had ceased to be a serious obstacle, at all events in a land campaign, is confirmed by the nearly coincident change in naval policy which led Germany into heavy ship-building programmes. Great Britain was still a serious obstacle at sea. Therefore a navy had to be built big enough to render her acquiescent. Great Britain acquiescent, and Austria compliant, France and Russia, the remaining signatories to the Guarantee, might be dealt with, it was thought, without fear of the result.

The outlay was heavy, but the hoped-for return was great. The Netherlands are a rich prize. Not merely their industrious and ingenious population, but their taxable capacity would make the German Empire easily the head State of Europe. If Holland has not the valuable coal and iron mines of Belgium, she has an important mercantile

marine, and most valuable colonies, including a possession in India. The economic importance of the Netherlands to Germany, and possession of the ports of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Antwerp, is manifest. A vast expansion of over-sea trade; a host of new and lucrative employments for German bureaucrats, made this sacrifice by a parsimonious people seem well worth while.

But there are other considerations. Belgium has been the cockpit of Europe, because Belgium, as a military base, has almost unrivalled advantages. Possession or occupation of Belgium—they are much the same thing—means command of its wealth of resources, and of its 3,400 or more miles of excellent main roads. Seizure of these is a great weight in the scale. A powerful army based on Belgium dominates France and more especially Paris. France could be reduced by it to a state of tutelage. Conversely, of course, a great French army based on Belgium would have the Lower Rhine at its mercy, and could "bottle up" Germany more effectively even than a blockade of her coast. That was, in part, how Napoleon held down Prussia. Plainly the neutrality and independence of Belgium is the one common-sense solution; and not less plainly the interests of Great Britain are vitally involved.

20 Hacking Through Belgium

Doubt as to the aims of Germany had long before been cleared up in responsible quarters informed of the facts. "The cynical violation of the neutrality of Belgium," Mr. Asquith said in his speech at the Guildhall, "was after all but a step—the first step—in a deliberate policy of what, if not the *immediate*, the ultimate, and the not far distant aim was to crush the independence and the autonomy of the Free States of Europe. First Belgium, then Holland and Switzerland—countries, like our own, imbued with and sustained by the spirit of liberty—were one after another to be bent to the yoke."

It was hardly necessary for General von Bernhardt, in his book "The Next War," to declare that the plan of the German General Staff was to march upon France through Belgium. In truth, he disclosed a secret that was as open as anything could be. The fortification by France of her eastern frontier, threatening to convert a campaign against France into a war of obstacles, at all events at the outset, defeated what has already been alluded to as the corner-stone of German strategy. A war of obstacles would not only allow France to gather her strength and to dispose of it where it would be most effective, but it would enable her to meet in the field a foe already shaken by the effort, and

by the inevitably heavy losses incurred in breaking the barrier. In a word, the odds in such a campaign would be so much against the invader that for Germany an attack made upon those lines was as good as hopeless.

That, of course, was as well-known in Paris as in Berlin. It was no surprise, therefore, when von Bernhardt published his "disclosure." The real object of the disclosure was to prevent the statesmen concerned from taking it seriously. So long as such a plan was with good reason suspected of being entertained secretly at Berlin, it was to be reckoned with. When it was given to the world in a frothy and bombastic book, it would probably be felt to have lost its weight. The device apparently succeeded. France, relying upon the neutrality of Belgium, left her north-eastern frontier practically open. Of the barrier fortresses, Maubeuge alone was adapted to resist a siege with modern artillery. As a fact, we know now that the device of giving away the secret did not succeed. On the contrary, it inspired the counter-plan which led the German armies to disaster.

Nevertheless, until the ultimatum was presented to the Government of Belgium few responsible men believed that Germany

22 Hacking Through Belgium

would go to the length of tearing up her own pledge.

In the face of that ultimatum, a country not more than one-eighth the area of Great Britain, and with a population less than that of Greater London, had to face a mighty military Empire which had sedulously spread the tradition that its armies were invincible. No wonder Germany reckoned on compliance, and all that compliance implied. It was much as if we ourselves had been suddenly challenged for national life and liberty by the world at large, with the certainty added of an immediate invasion. All the same, the Belgians did not flinch. They proved themselves worthy of the spirit of their fathers.

All this was involved in that "Scrap of Paper."

CHAPTER II

LIÉGE

GERMANY'S rejoinder to Belgium was a declaration of war.

On August 3, German troops crossed the frontier at Dolhain, Francochamps, and Stavelot. Already on the previous day a German army, waiting at Treves, had crossed the Moselle at Wasserbillig, Besselbriek, and Remich, and in defiance of protests occupied Luxemburg. These were the first military movements in the war.

Driving in the Belgian cavalry outposts along the frontier, the troops from Aix, three army corps under the command of General von Emmich, pushed forward to secure on the one hand a passage over the Meuse before effective opposition could be offered, and on the other to surprise Liége. The 9th corps was detached to seize Visé and the bridge at that place; the 10th marched by way of Verviers with the object of occupying the country to the south and approaching

24 Hacking Through Belgium

Liège along the level ground between the Vesdre and the Ourthe; the 7th corps followed the direct road from Aix to Liège.

On crossing the frontier, General von Emmich, in command of these troops, distributed to the civilian population a proclamation declaring the pacific intention of the invaders and promising protection for person and property if no hostility was shown. This proclamation, it is evident, had been drawn up and printed in anticipation of Belgian compliance, and no time had been afforded for amending it.

Since the Belgian Government had only on July 31 ordered a partial mobilisation, no considerable force, it was supposed, would be met with south of the Meuse, nor was Liège likely in so short a time to have been made ready for defence. The invading forces consequently brought forward no heavy siege guns. Their equipment in siege artillery was apparently limited to the twelve 5·9 howitzers, four to each army corps, which represented their ordinary field outfit. During the greater part of their advance, the 7th corps met with nothing more formidable than a weak screen of cavalry.

But the Belgian Government had taken prompt and energetic measures. The German troops sent to occupy Visé found on

arrival there that, though the Belgians had evacuated the main part of the town lying on the south bank of the river, they had already blown up the bridge, and were prepared from the suburb on the opposite bank seriously to dispute the passage.

The Meuse at this point is fully 300 yards wide. Some sixty yards of the bridge had been destroyed. It was necessary, therefore, for the Germans to construct pontoon bridges, and to cover this operation by shelling the Belgians out of their positions.

From well-covered entrenchments and loop-holed houses on the north bank, however, the Belgians kept up a galling fire, and, although out-weighted in the artillery duel, used their guns to good effect in hampering the German engineers. Repeatedly, when on the point of completion, the pontoon bridges were smashed by Belgian shells. The Belgians successfully contested the passage of the river for three days.

It was when this combat was at its hottest, on August 5, that a detachment of German cavalry was fired upon from the windows of some houses on the south bank. Exasperated by the difficulties met with, and their heavy casualties, the invaders forthwith drove out the inhabitants and fired the town. Many of the men, as they came out of the houses, were

26 Hacking Through Belgium

indiscriminately shot. The women and children were driven before the German troops with marked barbarity. Visé was reduced to ruins.

On the same day, the village of Argenteau, two miles up the river on the same bank, was similarly destroyed and its population decimated. There can be little doubt that this was an act of terrorism intended at once to conceal the attempt to bridge the river at that point, and to dispirit any defence of Liége.

To the Belgians the three days' struggle for the passage of the Meuse was of the utmost consequence. It gave General Leman the time necessary to prepare Liége for that resistance which has become, and will remain, one of the most famous episodes in European history.

Intrepid and resourceful, General Leman had thrown himself into Liége with the 3rd division of the Belgian army, and a mixed brigade of such troops as could be hastily got together. This force, of not more than 25,000 men, was reinforced by the civic guard, of the city and district, but it was still far short of the 50,000 troops needed to make up a complete garrison.

Thousands of the civilian inhabitants were willingly employed along the south and

south-eastern suburbs in hastily digging trenches, across the sectors between the forts. The troops blew up buildings likely to afford cover for an attack; tore up and blocked the roads; laid wire entanglements; mined the bridges across the Meuse, the Vesdre, and the Ourthe; prepared landmines; placed quick-firing guns at points of vantage, and installed searchlights and field telephones.

All this had to be done with the greatest possible expedition. The completeness and rapidity with which the work was carried out formed a surprising feat of skilful organisation.

When the advanced posts of the 7th German army corps came into touch with the outworks of the defence they found that nothing short of an assault in force would suffice. The prompt and effective fire of the forts within range proved that Liège was ready and on the alert.

The German plan provided for a simultaneous attack from the north, the south-east and the south-west, and if it had been carried out it is difficult to see how the fortress could have resisted even the first onset. The plan, however, miscarried.

In view of the time lost by the 9th corps in forcing a way across the Meuse General

28 Hacking Through Belgium

von Emmich was obliged to hold off the intended attack by the 7th corps. These troops unsupported were too weak to risk such an operation. The advance, besides, of the 10th corps by way of Verviers had not been so rapid as had been intended. Their march through a stretch of country, hilly and for the most part well wooded, had been actively harassed by a mobile force of Belgians intimately acquainted with the defensive possibilities of the region.

In the meantime, the preparations for resistance were pushed forward night and day, and General von Emmich knew that his task became tougher with every hour that was lost.

He was well aware of the weak spots of the fortress. Of its surrounding ring of twelve forts, six only were large and powerfully armed; the remainder were smaller works. The latter, however, were not regularly alternated with the larger forts. Two of the smaller works, Chaudfontaine and Embourg, were placed close together on the south-west; two others, Lantin and Liers, filled a gap of more than 10 miles across on the north-east; a fifth, Evegnée, was midway between the larger forts of Barchon and Fleron on the south-east. These were the three points selected for the assault. Fort

Evegnée covered by the fire of both Barchon and Fleron was the most difficult point of the three.

Needless to say, General Lemane, equally well aware of the strong and weak points, had taken his measures accordingly.

Evidently feeling that he could not afford delay, the German commander on August 5 launched the 7th army corps against Fort Evegnée with the object of taking it by storm. The bombardment had begun the day before, following a demand for surrender which had been refused, but the German howitzers were outranged by the heavy ordnance of the larger forts. The fire of the latter, skilfully directed, had proved unexpectedly destructive.

Taking advantage of such cover as had been left by partly demolished buildings, walls, and felled trees, the German infantry at the distance for the final rush closed up into columns of attack and, with the support of their artillery, endeavoured to carry the trenches on both sides of Evegnée with the bayonet. Not only, however, were they enfiladed by the guns of Barchon and Fleron, but they suffered huge losses from land mines.

The tactics adopted by the Belgians were well advised. The troops in the trenches

30 Hacking Through Belgium

held their fire until the attack fell into difficulties with the entanglements, and then withered the assault by well-aimed volleys.

The onset, nevertheless, was too determined to be shaken. Despite their heavy losses, the Germans negotiated the ditches, and though they were mowed down in hundreds by the machine guns now turned upon them, some gained the crest of the trenches. The earthworks were filled with dying and dead, but the storming parties still advanced over the bodies of their fallen comrades.

It was at this juncture that the Belgian troops received the order for a counter-assault. Rushing from the trenches *en masse* and in good order, they drove back the storming columns by an irresistible onset. In the pursuit, the German losses were enormous. The first attack had failed. Eight hundred prisoners fell into the hands of the victors, and were sent to Brussels as the first evidence of the national valour.

While that night the 7th army corps, withdrawn beyond the range of the forts, was licking its wounds, the 9th corps, having won the passage of the river below Visé, had advanced to the positions before the forts on the north-east, and on August 6 a second

attempt was made to carry the fortress by storm.

The attack was, of course, made from the south-east and from the north-east simultaneously. The sectors between the forts on the north-east had been not less carefully entrenched, and although the attack against fort Evegnée was again repulsed with losses to the storming columns equal to, if not greater than, those inflicted on the preceding day, some troops, apparently of the 9th corps, managed, despite a fierce resistance, to break through the north-east defences. Furious street fighting, however, forced them to retire. It was while covering this perilous retreat that Prince William of Lippe fell at the head of his regiment. The assault from the north-east, though carried out with the greatest determination, broke before an appalling rifle and machine-gun fire, and was turned into defeat by a counter-attack made at the decisive moment.

A critical period in the fighting on this day was when a body of German troops had penetrated as far as the bridge at Wandre. The bridge had been mined, and before the invaders could obtain possession of it, it was blown up. A superior force of Belgians regained the position.

The defence remained intact, and the ter-

rible scenes in the trenches bore testimony at once to its intrepidity and to the resolution of the assault. German dead and wounded lay thick upon the ground up to the very glacis of the forts. An evidence of the boldness of the enemy is that exploit of eight uhlans, two officers, and six privates, who, mistaken for Englishmen, rode during the fighting to the headquarters of General Leman with the object of taking him prisoner. They were killed or captured after a hand to hand struggle in the headquarters' building with members of the Belgian staff aided by gendarmes.

But though two assaults had failed with heavy loss of life, a third, even more desperate, was made the same night. This time it was delivered from the south-east against fort Evegnée, and from the south-west against forts Chaudfontaine and Embourg. The attack from the latter quarter was carried out by the 10th corps, which had at length come into position. The third assault against fort Evegnée was open and supported by a heavy bombardment. That against Chaudfontaine and Embourg was intended as a surprise. The troops of the 10th corps advanced as silently as possible, hoping to steal up to the trenches under cover of darkness. They waited until the

attack upon Evegnée had been going on for more than three hours.

The events of this anxious night in Liège have been admirably described in the vivid narrative of Mr. Gerald Fortescue, the special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, who was an eye-witness of them.

There was a bright moonlight, and the Belgians took advantage of it to strengthen still further their defensive preparations, more especially to the south of the city. They were relieved from the necessity of using lights which would have exposed them to the guns of the enemy. Liège is undoubtedly most open to attack on the south-east and south, and most of all by the flat approach between the Vesdre and the Ourthe. This forms the industrial suburb. The great ironworks, the small-arms and gun factory, the electric lighting works, and the railway depôts in this quarter would make the seizure of it particularly valuable. On the other hand the difficulties of preparing an effective defence were serious. Forts Embourg and Chaudfontaine are here placed close together in view of that fact. A practically complete line of entrenchments, however, closed the enceinte between Forts Fleron and Boncelles. It was, for the defenders, all to the good that these entrench-

34 Hacking Through Belgium

ments and the obstacles in advance of them had been so recently completed that the Germans could have no reliable knowledge of their details.

The city lay without a light, its ancient citadel rising from amid the sombrely moonlit forest of buildings like a great shadow. Only the searchlights playing from the forts gave signs of life and watchfulness. They travelled across the positions where the enemy had placed his artillery; and swept fitfully over the intervals of trampled country, where round ruined buildings and broken walls, in ditches, and amid entanglements multitudes of dead remained unburied.

Of course, the German commander knew that great activity must be going on in the fortress. That activity, if continued, meant ruin to the chance of taking the place by storm.

Half-an-hour before midnight, a furious bombardment against the south-east forts opened. High explosive shells burst with brilliant flashes and sharp uproar on the very glacis of the forts; a storm of shrapnel broke upon the trenches. The forts replied with energy. The city shook under the thunder of the combat.

With little delay, heavy forces of German infantry advanced. The night was favour-

able to such an attack. It was light enough for the troops to see their way, and yet dark enough to give such cover as greatly to diminish the risk. This was intended to be a bayonet fight. Though the grey-green of the German uniforms was barely distinguishable in such a light, the masses betrayed themselves by their movement. They could be seen from the trenches creeping up for the last rush.

When it was made their columns flung themselves across the intervening ground, and into the ditches with reckless resolution. But the fire of the defenders was as steady as it was destructive. Notwithstanding that the deadly lightning of the machine guns swept away whole ranks, men fought their way to the parapet of the entrenchments. It was brave, but it was vain.

Repeatedly the onslaught was renewed and repulsed. This, however, was not the main attack. At 3 a.m., just before daybreak and when the night was darkest, the assault suddenly opened, against forts Chaudfontaine and Embourg. No artillery announced it. So far as they could, the columns of the 10th army corps crept up silently, feeling their way. They found the defence on the alert. In spite of the rifle fire from the trenches supported by the guns of the forts, they

36 Hacking Through Belgium

rushed on in close formation. Searchlights of the forts picked them out. They fell by hundreds, but time and again scaled the slope of the entrenchments. There were intervals of furious bayonet fighting. The brunt of the struggle was borne by the 9th and 14th Belgian regiments. The 9th, says Mr. Fortescue, fought like demons. Gun fire alone could not stop such rushes. Only the unshakable bravery of the defending infantry saved the situation, and not until the ditches were filled with their dead and wounded did the Germans break and run.

The fury of the assault may be judged from the fact that the rushes were continued for five successive hours. More than once, as assailants and defenders mingled in fierce hand to hand combats and the trenches at intervals became covered with masses of struggling men, the attack seemed on the point of success. But as daylight broadened the weight of the onset had spent itself. As the beaten foe sullenly withdrew, a vigorous counter-attack from Wandre threw their shaken columns into confusion. The pursuit was energetically pressed. Numbers of fugitives sought safety over the Dutch border.

On the same day, General von Emmich asked for an armistice of twenty-four hours

to bury the German dead. It was refused. Liège had won a brief respite.

Refusal of the armistice may seem a harsh measure, but the Belgians doubtless remembered that it was by breach of the conditions of such an armistice that the Prussians in 1866 had overpowered Hanover. Such enemies were beyond the pale of confidence.

CHAPTER III

THE MORAL AND MILITARY EFFECT

WHEN, on August 4, King Albert read his speech to the joint meeting of the Belgian Chamber and Senate, it might well have been thought that the darkest hour had come in Belgium's long and troubled history. But the King spoke with unfaltering resolve. Come what might, the Belgian people would maintain the freedom which was their birth-right. In the moment for action they would not shrink from sacrifices. "I have faith in our destinies," King Albert concluded. "A country which defends itself wins respect, and cannot perish."

The speech echoed the feelings of a united nation. In the face of peril, party was no longer known. M. Emile Vandervelde, leader of the Socialists, accepted a post in the Ministry. Without hesitation, the two Houses voted the measures of emergency proposed by the Government. The announcement by M. de Broqueville, the Prime

Minister, that German troops were already on Belgian soil caused deep emotion, but the emotion was not born of fear. It was the realisation of how priceless is the heritage of liberty.

On that stirring day in Brussels, which witnessed the departure of the King to join his troops at the front, the sentiment uppermost was in truth "faith in the nation's destinies." Great Britain had sent her ultimatum to Berlin in defence of Belgian rights. Not merely reservists called to the colours, but volunteers in multitudes were anxious to take up arms. Crowds besieged the recruiting offices. The public feeling in the Belgian capital reflected the public feeling everywhere.

The mobilisation of the defensive forces of the country had proceeded smoothly and swiftly. Though it was common knowledge that in no part of Europe had the espionage system worked from Berlin become more elaborate, the national spirit was but intensified. Then came news of the fighting, and of the dauntless resistance offered by the garrison at Liége. Later came the first of many German prisoners of war.

Mistakes and miscalculations undoubtedly entered into the German disaster at Liége, and above all the mistake of grossly under-

40 Hacking Through Belgium

estimating the quality and efficiency of the Belgian forces. That mistake was persisted in during all the attempts to storm the fortress. It cost thousands of German lives. Not certainly until this war is over will the extent of the disaster be really known. But that it was a disaster of the greatest magnitude is beyond any question.

From the merely military standpoint, the shattering of three army corps is a huge price to pay even for victory. But the shattering of General von Emmich's army accomplished nothing. It had merely proved that to hurl men in massed formation against positions defended by modern guns and rifles is folly. Elementary common sense, however, would enforce the same conclusion. As the assaults upon Liége showed, elementary common sense is not a strong point of Prussian militarism. Because massed formations were used with effect by Frederick the Great, massed formations were the one idea of some of his would-be venerated.

The moral effect was greater than the military. It brought down in three days all that edifice of prestige which Prussian diplomacy, Prussian espionage, and Prussianised philosophy had been labouring for a generation to build up. To say that Europe gasped with surprise is to state the effect mildly.

The peoples opposed to German ambitions woke as from a spell. The aspect of the war had changed.

Here was an army, part of the great Fighting Machine in which war was presumed to be practically embodied as an exact science, beginning a campaign with the blunder of assuming that men fighting for their country were no better than half-trained mercenaries. The resistance to the passage of the Meuse; the resistance offered to the troops sent to seize the country south of Liège was treated as negligible. A general of resource and experience would have reckoned on that resistance as a certainty.

Neither Prussian strategy then, nor Prussian tactics, were the perfection they had been taken to be. Both had broken at the first test. Nowhere was the gravity of the moral effect better appreciated than at Berlin. Henceforward the effort of Berlin was to efface it. In that fact will be found the key to all the succeeding "severities" in Belgium.

That in Berlin, at all events in official and informed quarters, the surprise was as profound as elsewhere is proved by the fact that on August 9, through the neutral channel of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, the

42 Hacking Through Belgium

German Government made a second offer. The offer was in these terms:—

The fortress of Liége has been taken by assault after a courageous defence. The German Government regrets that as a consequence of the attitude of the Belgian Government against Germany such bloody encounters should have occurred. Germany does not want an enemy in Belgium. It is only by the force of events that she has been forced, by reason of the military measures of France, to take the grave determination of entering Belgium and occupying Liége as a base for her further military operations. Now that the Belgian army has, in a heroic resistance against a great superiority, maintained the honour of its arms in the most brilliant fashion, the German Government prays his Majesty the King and the Belgian Government to avert from Belgium the further horrors of war. The German Government is ready for any agreement with Belgium which could be reconciled in any conceivable way with its conflict with France. Once more Germany offers her solemn assurance that she has not been actuated by any intention to appropriate Belgian territory, and that that intention is far from her. Germany is always ready to evacuate Belgium as soon as the state of war will permit her.

Of course, the fortress of Liége had not been taken by assault, though perhaps the

Government of Berlin had been led to believe it had. Coming from such a quarter the tribute to Belgian valour is significant. Germany had fallen into a pit, and her "solemn assurance" was not good enough to lift her out of it. The reply of the Belgian Government was, a second time, an unhesitating refusal. Berlin must take the consequences, and those consequences were serious.

The first necessity was to clear up the mess, and if possible to conceal it; above all to conceal it from the troops who had to pass over this same route. They must hear of nothing but victories. Necessity for clearing up and concealment had a greater result in delaying the German advance than even the successful resistance of the Liège garrison.

Why, it may be asked, was the garrison withdrawn from Liège, leaving only a force sufficient to man the fortifications? For that step there were imperative reasons. To begin with, the defence of the city, as distinct from the defence of the forts, had served its purpose. It had not only delayed the German advance; it had inflicted grave disorganisation. It was certain, however, that at the earliest moment heavy German reinforcements would be brought up, and the defence outside the forts overpowered by sheer weight

44 Hacking Through Belgium

of numbers. In the violent fighting the garrison holding the trenches had suffered severe losses, though these were light in comparison with the crushing punishment they had inflicted. They formed, nevertheless, a body of excellent troops still more than 20,000 strong. To have risked the loss of these troops meant a reduction of the Belgian army in the field which must seriously cripple its effective. The need of the moment was a concentration of forces. Though the defence of Liége to the last was important, still more important was the purpose which the Belgian army was intended to serve throughout the campaign, and most important of all the successful defence of Antwerp. Upon the defence of Antwerp hung the nation's independence.

While, therefore, the way was still open for retreat, Generals Bertrand and Vermeulen, who had rendered conspicuous services and had proved, like General Leman, that the Military School at Brussels is a nursery of able and distinguished men, withdrew their forces and rejoined the main army.

This measure was carried out with so much promptitude and secrecy that the enemy, well-served as he was by spies, and in close observation of the movements of the garrison,

was not able to interfere.* General Leman remained to continue the defence of the permanent works. These had been provisioned for a siege of at least two months.

Before evacuating the city the troops blew up all save two of the many bridges which within the circle of fortifications cross the Meuse, the Ourthe, and the Vesdre. At Liége, the Meuse divides. A considerable district of the city is built on the island between the branches of the river. The bridges left intact were a concession to public necessity, but were those least likely to be of service to the enemy.

Destruction of the bridges greatly reduced the value of a hostile occupation. The importance of Liége to the Germans as part of their line of communications lay in command of the railways. These, however, were dominated by the forts. So long, then, as the latter held out, Liége, in any real military sense, was to the Germans valueless. In view of the position of the Belgians it was therefore a well-advised step to concentrate the strength of the defence on the works.

On August 8 and 9, the Germans before Liége were apparently quiescent. But this seeming respite covered an unceasing activity. Masses of wreckage mingled with

46 Hacking Through Belgium

dead bodies floating down stream bore testimony to the severity of the struggle for the passage of the Meuse. As rapidly as possible German engineers threw across the waterway beyond the range of the Liége forts five floating bridges. The passage secured, the enemy covered the country to the north with a screen of cavalry, obstructing observation by the Belgian outposts and guarding their bridge works against a surprise in force.

Evidently they were not certain that the departure of troops from Liége might not be a ruse. Their severe handling had taught them caution. Small bodies of uhlans stole into the city from the east on August 9. These, as usual, were men who had specially volunteered for the service. Though they might never return, the ambition for the Iron Cross is strong. They found the city and the entrenchments evidently evacuated. No hostilities were offered.

Reports to the German headquarters of this state of things led to a second demand for surrender. To secure protection for the defenceless population a deputation of seventeen leading citizens sought an interview with the German general. The deputation were seized as hostages.

On August 10, German troops marched in without resistance. The city was put under

martial law and a "fine" of £2,000,000 imposed upon it. But the occupation was a hollow triumph. Liége, as a military possession, was a husk from which the kernel had been carefully withdrawn.

The defence, followed by the continued resistance of the forts, had created a formidable tangle of difficulties. As the forts, by the use of reinforced concrete, had been adapted to resist modern artillery the shells, even of the 5.9 howitzers, made no impression upon them. It was necessary to bring up from Essen the 28 centimetre howitzers, and even the still heavier guns, 42 centimetre, specially made for the prospective siege of Paris.

Needless to say, with the strategical railways to Aix already working at full pressure, the transport of these heavy pieces played havoc with the cut and dried time-table. There was the necessity, too, not calculated for at this stage, of sending wounded to the rear, and of replacing by fresh troops the battalions broken in the attempted assault. To hurry troops to the front, lest the Belgians should move in force upon the Meuse, was urgent. The sending forward of supplies was, in consequence, badly hung up. The commissariat became for the time almost a chaos.

48 Hacking Through Belgium

If we sum up their situation at the end of the first fortnight of the war we find that the Germans had accomplished little or nothing. They had expected by that time to be close upon Paris. All they had, in fact, gained was a passage across the Meuse. It is impossible to overrate the military importance of this delay. During that fortnight the mobilisation of the French had been completed without interruption. At the end of it the British Expeditionary Force had been landed at Boulogne. The calculated advantages of secret preparation which had inspired the ultimata launched from Berlin were nullified. The first principle of German strategy had failed.

Important as a subsidiary means of communication, the floating bridges across the Meuse were in no sense adequate for the supply of such a force as it was intended to send through Belgium to defeat the armies of France and Great Britain and to seize Paris. Command of the railways was indispensable. But without a reduction of the forts at Liège that was out of the question.

The forts at Liège held out until August 19. The larger works were each triangular in formation, armed with both heavy and quick-firing guns mounted in steel revolving turrets. Three of these turrets were of the

disappearing type. On the discharge of the guns a turret of this type falls out of sight automatically. By means of telescopic and reflector sights, the guns can be "laid" for the next shot while the turret is hidden from outside view.

To storm the forts, as had been proved, was not practicable. They had to be broken up by the shells of the huge ordnance brought along for the purpose, and mounted on massive concrete beds.

One by one the forts were broken up. They offered, however, an unyielding resistance. Their garrisons knew that they were called upon to sell their lives for the Belgian fatherland. None deserted their posts of duty. There have been many acts of heroism in this war. The defenders of the forts at Liège deserve an honoured place in the memories of an emancipated Europe.

General Leman, who had taken up his quarters in Fort Loncin, was in the fort when it was blown up by a German shell, which had found its way into the magazine. He was saved by a signal act of bravery. "That I did not lose my life," he wrote in that affecting letter sent later from his place of confinement in Germany to the King of the Belgians, "is due to my escort, who drew me from a stronghold while I was being

50 Hacking Through Belgium

suffocated with gas from exploded powder. I was carried to a trench, where I fell.”

Most of the garrison were buried under the ruins, but the few survivors risked themselves in this act of devotion. No better evidence could be offered of the spirit of Belgian defence.

A German captain found the intrepid commander helpless and after giving him liquid refreshment carried him as a prisoner into the city. The defence of Liège, however, had fulfilled its purpose.

CHAPTER IV

THE BELGIAN ARMY AND ITS WORK

INDEPENDENTLY of delay, there was yet another reason for the defence of the forts at Liége which compelled the enemy to break them up. Their destruction meant that Liége *as a fortress* had ceased for the time to exist. For Belgium this was a heavy sacrifice. Its possible bearing, however, in the later stages of the war on a German defence of the Lower Rhine is manifest. As time goes by the trend of events makes it clear that the strategy of the Allied Powers was from the outset inspired by long views.

In consonance with those views the plan of the Belgian campaign was consistently carried out. From the first it was never part of that plan that the German inroad should be opposed in Belgium, where, close upon its base, its strength would have been greatest, and that of the Allies least. The purpose was to draw the German forces as far from their base and to lengthen out their line of

52 Hacking Through Belgium

communications as much as possible, and then, when they were at their weakest, and the Allies, in point of position, at their strongest, to face and defeat them.

But manifestly that purpose had by every device to be concealed. It was concealed. On the face of things all appearances lent colour to the conclusion that the Belgian army meant to stand or to fall in an endeavour to cover Brussels. There were announcements of the arrival of strong French forces. In view of the sufferings entailed by the invasion the French were indeed ready to send forward five army corps. Those added to the six divisions of the Belgian army would have offered a powerful opposition. But it would have been inferior strategy. In the event of defeat, which has always to be reckoned with, the effective and designed part of the Belgian army in the campaign must have been seriously crippled. The situation of the country would have been worsened.

Remembering that the object of the Belgians was to safeguard their independence, there was wisdom in the view, which weighed against present sufferings the vision of a long and peaceful future, and elected to act in co-operation with the larger scheme. It helps to appreciate the depth of the love of

freedom and the steadfast fortitude which have justly won the admiration of liberal Europe.

Taking up his headquarters in Louvain, King Albert disposed his forces along a line from Diest to Wavre. Between Wavre and Namur, with headquarters at Gembloux, the country was watched by a division of French cavalry. This line, it will be noted, describes an arc some 45 miles in extent, covering both Brussels and Antwerp. At this stage of the hostilities the necessity was for a strong force of cavalry. That of the Belgian army was in numbers inadequate. The French reinforcement was consequently of the greatest value.

It has commonly been supposed that the Belgian army was somewhat indifferent alike in discipline and in material. Such was the view then entertained at Berlin. Apparently it was not there realised that the time had long gone by when the Belgian as a soldier could justly be described as a bad copy of the Frenchman. Certainly the Belgian army was not trained upon the Prussian model. That, however, has proved to be all to its advantage.

Military efficiency is a relative term, but in every essential the Belgians were a highly efficient force. One of the best features of their system is that every regiment has its military school, where the men learn the

54 Hacking Through Belgium

elements of soldiering as an intelligent art. The essence of the Prussian system has been that the rank and file are taught to obey as machines. The Belgian recruit, on the other hand, had his interest enlisted in his work. He was taught the reason for things.

In Germany, the conscript spent much of his time learning to march in exact line at the parade step, every man with his rifle at the same angle. Even the length of the parade step was measured to an inch. Woe betide the *bursch* who fell short, or shouldered his rifle out of the correct slope. Points lost by officers at the inspection were passed on with interest. There is a value in this instruction, but in the Prussian system it was put before other things more valuable still.

The difference in essence between the Belgian army and the German lay in the fact that the Belgian recruit was not politically suspect of his superiors. He was a freeman serving his country, not an inferior in training to support a dominant caste. He could without danger be made something more than mechanically efficient.

Again his military education in actual field work was distinctly practical. Belgium is a densely populated country, full of buildings, hedgerows, and plantations affording excellent cover. Its army anyhow would be called

upon to face forces greatly superior in numbers. The practical work kept those points in view. It was addressed to successful ambushades; to fighting in open order; to rapid changes of position akin to guerilla tactics; to the defence of trenches, canals, and bridges. The Belgian soldier was asked to be resourceful and alert. If on manœuvres the army made none of the imposing show associated with mimic warfare in Germany, for the purposes it was designed to serve it was excellent. There could be no comparison, perhaps, between the parade smartness of a German and a Belgian regiment of infantry, but in essentials and for fighting on his own ground the Belgian was an easy first.

No better evidence of the business-like training of the Belgian army need be offered than its making use of the admirable roads of the country by organising those corps of cyclist scouts whose co-operation with the cavalry proved invaluable.

These, then, were the forces the King had at his disposal. As to the artillery its only fault was that there was not enough of it. It was strong, however, in light field guns capable of being briskly manœuvred, and forming a very serviceable and handy weapon of a recent type.

Hardly an expert is needed to reflect that

56 Hacking Through Belgium

with an army such as this the very last thing a capable general would do would be to offer a pitched battle against the ponderous legions of Germany, supported by an overwhelming mass of heavy guns. To do that would be asking for annihilation. The object of the Belgians was to harass, and wear down, and entrap.

It was a warfare in which instances of individual bravery and prowess and swift initiative established the value of the Belgian military training, and indicated that the Germans had no easier work before them than had Alva's Spaniards.

The country south of the Meuse the Belgians advisedly made no effort to defend. It is a country of deep valleys with rugged and precipitous sides; of ravines and streams falling between steep and rocky banks. The main mass of the Ardennes runs nearly south to north from Arlon to Namur. For the most part the hills are covered with dense forests alternating with marshy and wild plateaux and stretches of pastoral uplands. Little subsistence could be found by an invader in such a region.

Into Belgian Luxemburg the Germans poured the army of Saxons commanded by General von Hausen and the army commanded by Duke Albert of Wurtemberg.

The former fixed his headquarters at Marche, and the latter at Neufchatel. At the same time the army of the Crown Prince of Prussia established an advanced base in the city of Luxemburg.

The first purpose of these movements was to seize the railways—the line from Verviers to Luxemburg, the line from Liége to Jemelle, and in particular the main line from Namur through Arlon.

In possession of the line from Verviers the invaders at Luxemburg were linked up with Aix, but until they were in command of Liége and the junctions there the rest of the railways were of no value to them. They were obliged to transport supplies at great labour and expense over roads with heavy gradients. A further forward movement across the French frontier was in such circumstances impossible. The defence of Liége consequently held up the advance both north and south of the Meuse, and imposed a huge and to all intents useless consumption of resources. It also caused a severe congestion at Aix, where no fewer than eight army corps were at that time massing for the advance north of the Meuse across the Belgian plain.

Meanwhile north of the Meuse the Belgians were not idle. They destroyed bridges, and

58 Hacking Through Belgium

tore up roads. The railway bridges over the Geer at Warenne and Tongres were blown up; the railway junction at Landen rendered useless. All the rolling stock was moved to behind their lines.

Partly to check these defensive measures, partly also to commandeer much needed supplies as well as to gather information of the Belgian dispositions and incidentally to overawe the population, the Germans covered the country immediately to the north-east of Liège with numerous parties of uhlans. These raiders speedily came into contact with Belgian cavalry and scouts supported by light artillery and mobile bodies of infantry expert as skirmishers.

The tactics adopted by the Belgians were skilful. Before a hostile squadron or flying column they fell back, until what the Germans thought to be a successful pursuit had been pushed far enough. Then when the enemy turned to retreat he realised that he had been led into a *cul-de-sac*, and was attacked in turn from both flanks and from the rear. From every bit of cover along roads and from plantations the retreating forces were shelled and sniped at. Their losses in these running fights were in the aggregate gruelling. Frequently a last remnant put up a desperate resistance to extermination from the nearest

barn or other building into which they could fling themselves for refuge.

This unlooked-for experience was put down to the bitter hostility of the population whom the Belgian Government were assumed to have armed for the purposes of a guerilla warfare *à outrance*. It seems never to have entered the German mind that there could be military tactics different from their own. They still persisted in the belief that the Belgians as a military force were contemptible. When the heavy losses were realised, when numbers of their uhlans never returned, or were found lying dead in woods and along roadsides; above all when, owing to the danger of it, the requisitioning failed to give the supplies expected, "reprisals" were resolved upon. The columns sent out were strengthened, and reinforced by guns and infantry, with orders to lay waste the villages and farms which had been the scenes of annihilations and defeats. The "beasts" of Belgium were to be taught a severe lesson. Very soon the country within sight of Liège was a blaze of devastation. Without distinction of age or sex, those of the population who could not escape were butchered. In this rapine, apparently, the German troops were allowed a free hand.

From now the fighting presented many characteristics of a warfare of savagery. On

60 Hacking Through Belgium

the one side, the Belgians were dealt with as "rebels," to be slain without mercy. On the other side, revenge inspired a resistance still more daring. No doubt the reports brought in to the German headquarters by survivors of the raids asserted that the losses were mostly due to civilians. Very naturally they would be reluctant to admit defeat by Belgian soldiery. Men flying for their lives are not usually exact observers. Evidently on the part of those responsible the belief prevailed that their men had not been lost in military operations but had been waylaid and murdered. A policy of systematic terrorism was entered upon.

At the back of this policy evidently was exasperation at the Belgian resistance, and its grave results. The policy, however, only aggravated matters. On the same day (August 10) on which they entered into occupation of Liége, the invaders began their operations north of the Meuse on a larger scale. They dispatched a flying column of 6,000 cavalry with artillery and infantry supports towards Limburg by way of Tongres and Hasselt. At the same time, they attacked the passage over the Meuse at Huy.

Tongres, held only by some Belgian outposts, was seized by the Limburg column with little difficulty, but at Hasselt they were

opposed by a nearly equal force of Belgians. They were allowed to advance in apparent security. Suddenly barricades of stones and carts thrown up across the roads proved to be cleverly contrived concealments for machine guns. An unexpected attack developed. The column hastily deployed through woods and across fields. A strong body attempted to push on through the town in order to secure the bridge. The attempt was not successful. The supporting infantry were forced to retreat. In covering that movement the cavalry lost heavily. A number were made prisoners. Others dashed across the Dutch frontier into Maastricht. The retreat was harassed on both flanks and rear as far as Tongres.

At Huy, where there were some fortifications of an unimportant character, the Belgians held a bridge-head across the river giving access to the country between Liège and Dinant. The Germans attacked the works with heavy howitzers. The fort, however, held out until August 12. Before evacuating the place the Belgians blew up the bridge. The rearguard of the defenders rushed across under a rain of hostile shells, closely pursued. A squadron of German cavalry heading the chase were on the bridge when the part of the structure already mined crashed skyward in a mass of dust and flame.

62 Hacking Through Belgium

Next day (August 11) a reconnaissance in force was undertaken as far as Tirlemont and Jodoigne by a flying German column some 2,000 strong. These troops, advancing through Orsnael and Landen, laid the country waste in a methodical manner. Civilians arrested on charges of sniping were shot on the wayside without ceremony. The population fled in terror. The wake of the invasion was marked by the pall of smoke rising from burning ricks, and homesteads, and ruined villages. What had been a fruitful countryside was turned into a desolation. Even priests administering the last unction to dying victims were cut down or speared.*

At Dormael the incursion was opposed by a body of Belgian lancers, who fell back before it. The column pushed on as far as Bost, in sight of Tirlemont. There the Belgian infantry closed in. Fearing an ambuscade the Germans beat a retreat. They were chased through St. Trond and Warenne to their lines near Liége. In this pursuit of over twenty miles they lost a large proportion of their total force.

One effect of these checks was that in suc-

* This has been officially denied from Berlin; but the Belgians declare that priests seemed specially to be marked out for attack. It is certain that a number lost their lives.

ceeding operations the enemy made a confession of the efficiency of the Belgians by employing their crack troops. In no modern army is the difference, and it may be added the distinction, between crack regiments and the rest more marked than in that of Germany. Out of the mass of the infantry the best shots and the smartest men are picked to form the regiments of *jaegers* (hunters) who are trained to fight in open as well as in close order. This is a coveted promotion, but it leaves the ordinary line regiments at a standard below modern ideas of real fighting efficiency. The total strength of the *jaegers* was, at the beginning of the war, about 70,000. They form the only element in the Germany infantry which can seriously compare with, say, British infantry. Taking the Belgian infantry as a whole they were well up to the same level, and still mustered close upon 90,000 men.

Admission to the German cavalry rests on a basis of class, but some of the regiments are close corporations of the Prussian and Hanoverian aristocracy. One of the most famous, and most exclusive, the Death's Head Hussars, a corps which gained its reputation during the Seven Years' War, boasted that it had never yet retreated save under orders. Stories of its daring form

64 Hacking Through Belgium

part of the pabulum of every German school-book.

On August 12 began the biggest attempt so far made to find out the disposition and strength of the Belgian main force. The energetic measures taken by the Belgian Government to deal with the spy system had evidently disorganised the practice. Nothing was known for certain either of the Belgian main army's movements or of its intentions, a proof of the prudent ability of its command.

It was essential that the enemy should if possible obtain that information. The importance to the Germans of manœuvring the Belgian main army into a position which would uncover Antwerp, and, by forcing it upon Brussels, exposing it to defeat in a situation which would either compel it to retire across the French frontier or to surrender, need not be insisted upon. If that could have been accomplished it would not only affect the whole campaign in the western theatre of war, but would restore the prestige already so badly damaged.

These considerations explain the attack made upon the Belgian lines on August 12 and 13. The attack was directed to two points—Eghezée, to the north of Namur, and Diest. The main German column was

directed against Diest in an attempted turning movement. The attack at Eghezée was designed to assist that movement by compelling the Belgians to carry out a general retirement westward.

The troops sent against Diest were a division of cavalry; a brigade made up of *jaeger* regiments, and a strong force of artillery. The total strength was probably some 26,000 men, more than half of them mounted. Of the cavalry one of the corps was the Death's Head Hussars. The force thrown forward to Eghezée was apparently a division, with strong cavalry support, and a fleet of motor-cars carrying machine guns.

Neither attack accomplished its purpose. That directed against Diest proved disastrous. With every inhabitant a scout for the defending troops, it was impossible that, swift as its movement was, the column could take the Belgians by surprise. Most of the country the enemy passed through had been wasted, and was apparently deserted. Appearances, however, are in that respect not to be relied upon. Timely intimation was received in spite of all the precautions of German scouts, and when the column reached the village of Zelck both its strength was known and its objective accurately surmised.

The force divided for a simultaneous

66 Hacking Through Belgium

attack upon Diest and upon the village of Haelen three miles to the south-east. The Belgians had hastily got Haelen ready for a stout defence. They had loop-holed the houses, and had masked a battery of guns in an ancient fort commanding the main street. Seven hundred men held the position.

German cavalry tried to rush it. Mr. Wm. Maxwell, the special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, in a graphic account of the affair, speaks of the headlong dash made by the German 17th Dragoons along the main street, and up the glacis of the fort, which they tried to mount on horseback. They were shot down from the houses, and from the fort at the same time, and left the street encumbered with dead and dying men and horses. As they retired they found their retreat cut off and 300 of the survivors remained in the hands of the victors as prisoners of war.

At Diest the like headlong tactics met with a similar fate. Evidently the Germans thought they had worked a surprise, and that impression was strengthened by their finding the bridge over the deep and sluggish Dyle still intact. The bridge had been left standing as a ruse. It was covered by well-hidden machine guns. When German horsemen

tried to race across they were shot down in masses.

In this attack upon Diest the Death's Head Hussars maintained their tradition, but at an appalling cost. Only a comparative remnant of the corps returned alive. They lost the colours of the regiment, which were afterwards for a time hung in the ancient church as a trophy.

Despite the disaster to the cavalry the attack was fiercely pressed. At the height of the bombardment Lieut. van Donon, heading the men of the town fire brigade, crept round to a ditch from which they were enabled to enfilade a German battery, and shoot down the gunners.

As usual, the heaviest losses were sustained by the invaders during their retreat. Along the roads and across the fields south of Diest Belgian peasants found and buried some 2,800 German dead.

In this battle the Belgian force engaged was a cavalry division reinforced by a brigade of all arms. It was mainly on both sides a cavalry action, with the Belgian skill and resource in skirmishing pitted against that of the enemy.

At Eghezée the German attack was intended to break through the French cavalry. There, too, timely information had been re-

68 Hacking Through Belgium

ceived. At the critical moment the Germans found themselves suddenly assailed on flank by Belgian troops from Namur. The result was a severe repulse. Many of the motor-cars, held up on the roads by troops in retreat, defending themselves against dashing charges of the French horse, had to be abandoned.

CHAPTER V

THE GERMAN TIDAL WAVE

WHETHER or not the operations just described had in the estimation of the German commanders fulfilled their purpose cannot be decided, but is at least open to doubt. Not only in the more serious fighting but in the numerous smaller skirmishes and unceasing affairs of outposts the losses to the invaders, were it really known, would probably appear surprising. The losses fell mainly upon their cavalry, and most of all upon their uhlans. A perfect cloud of these raiders had swarmed over the country, and had made themselves hated by acts of cruelty and pillage. They were most of all the agents of the Terror. Of the nineteen regiments of them in the German army, some fourteen seem to have been employed in Belgium. At the end of ten or twelve days the larger part of this force were either killed, wounded, or prisoners. No doubt can be entertained that they were turned out to

70 Hacking Through Belgium

live upon the country. They lived badly; were entrapped right and left; revenged themselves by acts of outrage; but waged against an enraged and unjustly ruined people what was in fact an impossible contest. The policy of sending out roving bands in a country as populous as northern Belgium was an absurdity.

Up to the point now reached the German campaign in Belgium had been one consistency of gross mistakes. Almost incalculable damage had been done; murder and rapine were rampant; but anything like a firm conquest, or the first steps towards it, was as far off as ever. It is notable that after his exploits in Belgium the uhlan fills a very minor part. Eastern Belgium had to no small extent become his grave.

So far the operations had enabled the Belgian army to inflict heavy losses while remaining itself intact. And now appeared a new factor—the advance of the French into Belgian Luxemburg. The Belgians still held Namur and the two bridges over the Meuse at that point. It was possible, since the Germans had seized Huy, that they would move in force upon Dinant, and, crossing the river above that place, attempt a diversion in the rear of the Belgian positions, in conjunction with a second effort to

cut the Belgian army off from its base at Antwerp.

To prevent this the French crossed the Meuse and occupied Dinant. By the time they arrived the anticipated German movement had already begun. In part the French advance was directed to feeling the strength and disposition of the enemy in the Ardennes with a view to their own plans, but it was also directed to assist the Belgians in holding up the hostile march westward.

The result of these opposing movements was, on August 15, a sharp collision. An effort on the part of the Germans to cross the river above Dinant was thrown back by the French. With a greatly superior force the Germans advanced against the town prepared to carry it by assault.

In describing the assault Mr. Granville Fortescue states that the Germans moved up a strong body of light infantry supported by mountain batteries. The French had established themselves on the outlying hills and in the ancient citadel, a rocky mass on the south bank of the Meuse, commanding from its summit a view of the river for many miles in either direction. The attack was determined and some of the outlying positions were carried by assault. French reinforce-

72 Hacking Through Belgium

ments, however, were brought up and the positions retaken.

In the town, defended by a French regiment of the line, barricades had been thrown across the streets. The bridge was fortified by wire entanglements, and held by an infantry detachment with a mitrailleuse.

The picturesque old place, sheltering under the high limestone cliffs on one side of the river, and struggling up the wooded hillside on the other, was subjected to a hot bombardment. As the shells tore through roofs and walls the inhabitants sought refuge in their cellars.

Following an obstinate fight, the Germans had won the crest of the cliffs above the old town, and under cover of a heavy artillery fire had stormed the citadel. The town and bridge, however, were still held. Further French reinforcements, with guns, cleared the Germans off the cliffs. From that position the French gunners in turn bombarded the citadel. One of their first shots cut through the flagstaff and brought down the German colour hoisted upon it.

Thus the first assault upon Dinant was beaten off, though not without serious casualties to the defending force. Renewing the attack next day with larger forces the Germans succeeded in gaining the town

on the east bank of the river which here runs nearly north and south. The part of Dinant on the opposite bank remained in the hands of the defenders, who commanded the passage across the waterway.

In possession of the old town a resolute attempt was made by the enemy to force the passage. Two divisions of cavalry, one of them the cavalry of the Prussian Guard, 8,000 strong, with several battalions of *jaegers*, and maxim companies engaged in this operation. While infantry lined the positions on the east bank, and artillery opened a bombardment from the citadel and cliffs, the cavalry dashed across the bridge *en masse*, opening a way for the *jaegers*. In the steep streets and from behind garden walls in the new town an obstinate battle raged. It was determined by the onset of a division of French chasseurs, who drove the Germans in flight down to the margin of the river. The bridge became a mass of struggling fugitives, stumbling over fallen horses and men. To save themselves, those cut off threw themselves into the water. Many in the confusion were drowned.

From Namur the French remained masters of the west bank, and at Namur the Belgians still possessed an important bridge-head. The Allied forces too held

74 Hacking Through Belgium

their positions from Namur across the country through Gembloux and Louvain to beyond Diest. But behind this dyke opposed by the Allies the grey-green flood of invasion was steadily rising making ready to burst through, and with apparently irresistible mass and momentum to cover with its devastation the rich fields of Belgium and the fair land of France.

On the face of things it looked as though the enemy had been taught caution. In front of the Allied lines stretched a Norman's Land 10 to 15 miles in breadth. No Germans were met with nearer than Ramillies. In the intervening desolation, amid the hideous squalor of war, occasional terrified peasants, old men or widowed women, fled into hiding places at the distant approach of strangers, friend or foe.

Brussels had begun to regain breath. Though theatres, picture-houses, and other places of public entertainment were closed, and the busy traffic of the boulevards had shrunk to a rare and occasional vehicle, the shops, closely shuttered during the first days of the Terror, had reopened, and *cafés* were thronged with crowds eagerly debating the latest news.

When, on Monday, August 17, the Government removed from Brussels to

Antwerp, it was realised that grave events were impending. All had been in readiness for removal for some days. At the Palais de Justice the courts and registries were closed and seals placed on the doors. Measures had been taken for the protection of the nation's priceless art treasures, and to meet all emergencies. The Government issued a reassuring proclamation, exhorting the public to confidence, and expressing the resolve at all costs to safeguard the country's freedom. Despite the deep anxiety of the moment, the public spirit remained firm. There was no trace either of disorder or of panic.

It was known that so long as the forts at Liège continued to fight the German advance could not begin. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Germans to cover their preparations with the closest veil of secrecy, the Belgian Government was kept well informed. Liège had become for its remaining inhabitants a prison. As a precaution the invaders had divided up the city by street barricades. Every approach to the place was closely patrolled. At night the only sounds were the heavy footfall of Prussian patrols, along streets where ruined houses showed the gaps made by shell fire, or over quays past bridges whose *débris* was heaped

76 Hacking Through Belgium

in the rivers. Many houses were doorless, but all were dark and silent. Nevertheless, news leaked through the German lines, and when on August 18, having silenced all but two of the forts, the German advance began, neither the Belgian Government nor the Belgian commanders were left in any uncertainty. The spirit and resource which had baffled all the energy of Spain, still baffled all the power of Prussianised Germany.

A strange spectacle was presented by that seemingly countless and endless host as it defiled along every main road leading to the north-west. No words can adequately picture the movement of an army, or rather a combination of armies, totalling nearly three-quarters of a million of men. The effect is too vast, and it might well be asked what human power could withstand such a multitude welded by an enormous labour of organisation into a machine of destruction and death. Onward it flowed, like the tide sweeping through the channels of a shore, ready to burst upon obstacles in angry breakers, but breakers of fire. Lines of lances moved among its forest of bayonets. Endless trains of guns and automobiles, field kitchens, field bakeries, huge wagons bearing pontoons and drawn by long teams of horses,

ponderous caissons, camp equipment, portable smithies, rumbled successively past. The dust rose from the hot roads and floated over the deserted and trampled fields. Sabres and bayonets flashed back the August sunlight. And for hour after hour the mass rolled on, seemingly without end.

Not since the days of Attila has Western Europe been offered such a spectacle; nor has it been paralleled since the Gothic hordes rolled through the Alps on to the plain of northern Italy. The Goths were barbarians. These, their descendants, had the resources of civilisation, but applied to the same hopes and aspirations—dominion and the vision of material riches; inspired by the same belief in their own unconquerable prowess; impelled by the same conviction of their inborn right as the earth's most valiant to possess and to rule the sunny lands held by cowards and degenerates. It is a profound mistake to assume that the philosophy of a Treitschke is anything new. It is as ancient as Germany. Ever since the wild swamps, and sandy plains and gloomy forests of central Europe became the home of a prolific people, who win from them a hard and penurious livelihood, that people have dreamed of the countries to the west and south where the beauties of art speak of the

78 Hacking Through Belgium

resources of the soil, and where no dark and frozen winter binds the year.

Twelve army corps traversed the Belgian plain. A corps of the German army is made up on a war footing to 63,000 men. The total of this vast host could not therefore have been far short of 700,000 even allowing for losses. Commonly, an army corps is spoken of as though it were inconsiderable. An army corps, however, is a complete army, and a huge body of men.

Though it might look complex, and was indeed a triumph of machinery, the plan of the advance was simple. The right flank was covered by an overwhelming mass of cavalry. It was estimated that there were 65,000 out of the 83,000 sabres of the German army in that truly formidable column. The rest advanced in three main columns heading for the roads between Brussels and Namur. It was the intention to push right on to the French frontier before the French could assemble there in sufficient strength to stem the onset. A host of this magnitude would take two days and a night to pass any given point. The distance between the van and the rear was half the breadth of Belgium.

One reason, it is now evident, for the German incursion into Limburg was a clear-

ing of the country between Liège and Maastricht in order unobserved to muster their troops and transport for the great trek. The military situation immediately following the general advance was interesting. Probably it has given rise to more misunderstanding than any other phase of the war.

In the declaration, already alluded to, issued by the Belgian Government on its removal to Antwerp the statement was made that "pursuit of the aim assigned to the Belgian troops in the general plan of campaign predominates over everything. . . . What is going on at our gates is not the only thing to be thought of. A strategic movement conceived with a well-defined object is not of necessity a retreat. . . . There is at the present time no necessity for letting ourselves be hung up. To do so would be to play into the hands of the Germans."

Why pursuit of the aim assigned to the Belgian troops predominated has been pointed out. What was the strategic movement with a well-defined object?

In their dispositions for the advance the Germans had placed their main force of cavalry, and a great strength of mobile guns on their right in order that that wing might execute a rapid flank attack on the Belgian army, and if possible envelop it. So far as

80 Hacking Through Belgium

was known the Belgian lines still extended from Diest through Aerschot and Louvain to Wavre. They certainly did until the night of August 17. But during that night they were rapidly and secretly changed. The left was extended eastward beyond Diest, and the right withdrawn so that the army in its new situation occupied entrenched positions along and behind the Dyle. In these positions it was well prepared successfully to resist a force vastly superior in numbers, and in any event was within easy distance of the outer forts of Antwerp.

To mask this change of front, a slight covering force was left at Louvain, and some cavalry was thrown forward for purposes of observation as far as Tirlemont.

On August 18, this cavalry came into contact with the uhlans forming the advanced front of the German columns. They promptly fell back towards Louvain, and after a show of opposition before that place retired upon Malines.

The Germans believed that Louvain was still held in force, and opened a bombardment. After their experience of Belgian ruses, they did not venture to enter the city until some hours later.

To the Belgians this gain in time was essential. Since it had been necessary to

occupy the old lines until the last possible moment, the change of front had not been altogether completed when the rapidly moving right wing of the vast invading host threatened in part to frustrate it. An army with its impedimenta and guns cannot be transferred from place to place in a moment and one part of the Belgian force had a distance to cover of nearly 20 miles.

At all costs, therefore, it was necessary to hold up the German movement. That was not easy because the uhlans and armed motors spread themselves out along all the roads and by-roads in a broad fan-shaped formation covering many miles of country. Nevertheless, the stratagem at Louvain proved successful. Three regiments of infantry, a corps of guides and the 3rd and 9th, with a cavalry division deceived the enemy into the belief that they were the covering troops of a much larger force, and he drew up to deploy for battle. As was inevitable, the Belgian force employed suffered somewhat severe losses. It was indeed a devoted piece of service, but it served its purpose. When the Germans advanced in battle order against the assumed Belgian lines they found them deserted, and must have experienced some of the feeling of treading on a missing stair.

Beginning with outpost operations on

82 Hacking Through Belgium

August 18, the battle of Louvain, as it has been called, was continued during August 19 and 20. On the one hand, there was the fighting between the Belgian troops already referred to, detailed to hold up the right of the German advance; on the other, there was an attempt by the Germans along the front from Diest to Aerschot to turn the left of the new Belgian position. Along the centre, to aid the attempted turning movement, a formidable artillery duel developed.

The troops before Louvain, some 20,000 strong, carried out with brilliant gallantry the tactics most effective in such a situation. Retiring under all the cover available whenever the pressure of numbers became too threatening, they seized every opening afforded for a counter-attack, and by these alternative advances and retreats reduced the forward progress of the enemy to a minimum. The Germans found themselves obliged to search every position with their artillery, before throwing forward their skirmishers, and finally advancing masses of infantry. With an intimate knowledge of the country the Belgians enticed them into the most difficult places, and then suddenly swept back and dislodged them. By the time reinforcements had been brought up, the enemy found the position evacuated.

So from hour to hour the struggle went on, along roads, through woods, behind hedges and ditches, with furious rushes and counter-rushes of infantry, and dashes of cavalry; the air filled with the puffs and smoke of bursting shrapnel, the boom of battle travelling slowly over the countryside like a laggard thunderstorm with its lightnings chained to earth. To what an extent skilful troops may arrest the advance of a hostile force enormously greater in numbers has been many times exemplified in warfare. The Germans employed their overwhelming superiority in cavalry and machine guns with the greatest energy. They had to deal, however, with elusive yet bold and persistent enemies. In this part of Belgium, the country is perfectly flat. There are no hillocks to assist observation. Information by airmen was rendered unreliable by the rapid movements of the Belgian forces. Literally the invaders had to grope their way, imagining that the main army was in front of them. Beyond the narrow horizon the danger lurked, but exactly where, it was hard to say.

The most serious effort on the part of the invaders was to throw a large force towards Antwerp. Against the strong position held by the Belgians and their change of front the effort failed. The assumed Belgian left

84 Hacking Through Belgium

wing had become its centre. Strongly posted as that now was with a deep river in front and a great fortress in the rear the position made an attack too costly to be pressed. Half at least of the whole mighty German host would have been necessary to force it. That, however, would have thrown the programme into confusion. The artillery duel went on from daylight to darkness, but the Belgians showed themselves unshakable. All the efforts of the invaders to throw troops over the Dyle were beaten off with heavy loss. Finally, the Germans were compelled to pass on, leaving the Belgian main army a still unbeaten menace.

The military considerations which dictated the Belgian strategy may be readily made clear. Since the base of the army was Antwerp, where it had all its supplies and munitions, the first essential was not to be cut off from that base. An army defending its native country, and among its own people may, so far as foodstuffs are concerned, be said to be at home anywhere, but it cannot in modern warfare fight without shells and bullets, and when those it brings with it are exhausted its power as a present-day fighting force is at an end. No army can encumber itself in the field with more than the munitions it immediately needs. It has conse-

quently to keep in touch with its reserve stocks, or, in military phrase, to keep its line of communications open.

That to a general in command is as important as victory. Indeed, a victory gained if it left the communications cut would be illusory.

A second consideration, not less essential, is that of not fighting in such a position that, in the event of being compelled to retire, the army, in order to save its communications, must pass across the front of the victorious force. Irreparable defeat would almost certainly be the result. Fighting in a situation of that kind is known as fighting with the front of the army turned to what should be its flank, or in military phraseology is a "front to a flank" position. It is one of the purposes of strategy to manœuvre a hostile force into such a position whenever possible.

As the Belgian army was disposed up to August 17, it stood "front to a flank," and if it had fought in that situation it must, owing to its inferior numbers, have been surrounded, or been compelled to fall back upon or beyond Brussels, so that its communications with Antwerp would have been cut off. It must consequently, whatever the bravery of its officers and men, have been compelled

86 Hacking Through Belgium

in a few days either to lay down its arms or to be annihilated.

Possibly the Germans thought that it meant to remain where it was for the purpose of covering Brussels, and that sentimental rather than military reasons influenced its movements. As a fact, this seeming incompetence was a ruse, designed to induce the Germans to throw their main force forward in the direction of Brussels rather than in the direction of Antwerp. The latter place, if they had been ably commanded, would have been made their first objective. Seizure of Antwerp would have settled the business. They fell, however, blindly into the trap laid for them, and blundered on towards Brussels only to discover, too late, that they had been left with the shadow, but had lost the substance.

In any event, for the Belgians, save in a position of complete security to have offered battle to an army more than six times as numerous, with a crushing superiority of some 2,000 guns would simply have been throwing the lives of brave men away to no purpose. Decidedly the King of the Belgians was not the man to "play into the hands of the Germans."

CHAPTER VI

THE GERMANS IN BRUSSELS

FROM August 17 to August 21 were days of intense suspense in Brussels. Dr. E. J. Dillon has drawn a picture of them sober yet arresting and faithful. Naturally, after the removal of the Government, there was a feeling that the city was on the eve of grave events. Amid the public anxiety the Burgomaster, M. Adolphe Max, showed the evidences of that civic spirit and unfaltering firmness, worthy of the greatest years in the old struggle for freedom, which later made him the hero of his fellow-citizens.

Emotions changed from hour to hour, but when the Civic Guard left for the front, amid demonstrations of patriotic fervour, it was the common belief that the forces of Belgium might successfully keep off the enemy, at any rate until aid arrived. Barricades were built across the streets, and lines of trenches thrown up. Brussels resigned itself to the prospect of a siege.

88 Hacking Through Belgium

Little did the crowds who discussed these events know of the real purpose of them. Under present-day conditions of warfare Brussels is wholly indefensible. It lies for the most part in a hollow commanded by hills from which long-range guns could destroy it without the possibility of effective reply.

The object of the apparent preparations for a siege was to mislead, not the citizens of Brussels, but the foe who had trampled on the nation's rights. The Government and the authorities in Brussels were well aware of the enemy's swarm of spies in their midst. They were not ignorant that their every movement was forthwith betrayed. A wireless installation discovered on the building lately occupied by the German Ministry had been unearthed and dismantled, but there were still, doubtless, secret channels of communication open. Rightly concluding that German plans would be adjusted to this information, they met ruse with ruse. The enemy was to be led on to an empty and merely theatrical triumph.

Of course, the ordinary citizen, not in the secret, took the siege preparations at their face value. The German advance was evidenced, apart from reports and rumours, by the crowds of homeless fugitives, who like flotsam driven before a storm, tramped into

the city footsore, weary, and miserable, their few belongings, hastily snatched together, carried on their backs, or piled on the light carts drawn by dogs. At first in bands, the inflow swelled until these pitiful processions filled every eastern and south-eastern road; and soon the railway stations were crowded by people struggling for trains to the coast.

Then came ambulances and trains of wounded. On the night of Thursday, August 20, Brussels did not go to bed. News arrived in the early hours that the Germans were close upon the city. From their posts in the Forest of Soignies, the Civic Guard marched in. It became known that they had been ordered to Ghent, and that the capital was to be surrendered without firing a shot.

The public at large were stunned, and their astonishment was without doubt shared, not in Belgium only, but abroad. Undaunted by the turn of events, the 20,000 men of the Civic Guard passed through the streets *en route* for Ghent intoning the "Marseillaise" in a thunderous chorus. Meanwhile those responsible wisely kept their counsel. The proclamation that the military evacuation was a measure necessary for the well-being of Brussels itself and of the country was, with judicious suppression as to reasons, the truth.

The public, of course, did not realise the

90 Hacking Through Belgium

military situation. All they for the moment grasped was the peril of an occupation by troops whose atrocities had been marked by a trail of burned-out villages and slaughtered peasantry. The crowds of fugitives from the country into Brussels were speedily swelled by yet even greater crowds out of the city. The roads to Ghent became thronged with refugees. Afoot and in every sort of vehicle, they fled from the on-coming Terror, the darkness relieved only by distant glares which told of villages in flames, and the fear sharpened by the sullen boom of far-off guns.

Meanwhile, in Brussels, the effort of the large non-resident population to get out while the way was yet open assumed the aspect of a panic. The first care of the authorities was, of necessity, to remove the wounded, who had been placed, not only in hospitals, but in large stores turned for the time being into hospitals. This, of course, taxed the railway accommodation. It was necessary, too, that no rolling stock should fall into the hands of the invaders. Trains available were therefore limited. Would-be passengers fought their way with cries and curses into the compartments until these were choked with people all in a state of excitement or dread. Every train, even the last, left hundreds of the terror-stricken behind.

It would be untrue, however, to assume that these refugees represented the spirit or feeling of the population of Brussels as a whole. The first shock passed, the population awaited developments without any marked signs of dismay.

German cavalry reached Teuveren, a suburb of Brussels, about six o'clock that morning. The street barricades were hastily removed by the city authorities. Those had served their turn and were no longer wanted.

The invaders' formal entry took place at two in the afternoon. The clatter and jingle of heavy dragoons through deserted suburban streets, where the houses had been closely shuttered, announced that Brussels was in the power of the Prussians. The dragoons were the head of a column of infantry. These dauntless warriors had waited nearly eight hours in order to make sure that the "contemptible" Belgian military had in fact withdrawn.

Very soon the fact became evident that the entry had been carefully stage-managed in order to render it as "impressive" as possible. Some 50,000 of the smartest and freshest troops were paraded across the city. This display, which occupied some hours, was intended to convince the Bruxellois of the utter futility of Belgian resistance. With many of

the population curiosity prevailed over repugnance, and they stood in throngs along the boulevards while the show went by. Seeing this impassive but orderly multitude, and doubtless convinced that the conquest of Belgium had already been accomplished as the first fruits of the war, the troops, by permission, struck up "Deutschland über Alles." In the fighting during the earlier days of the campaign the German troops, despite the plundering of the territory they had overrun, were in a half-famished state, and the horses of their cavalry, in particular, perishing of hunger and fatigue. Many prisoners were picked up in the last state of exhaustion. They might readily have been murdered by the enraged peasantry, but it is doubtful if there is even one clearly proved instance of a German having been assassinated under such circumstances.

The forces, however, now paraded bore few of the traces of warfare, a proof to the spectators that the Belgian operations were on paper! An incident recorded is that of several officers who rode in a motor-car. The group, apparently part of a divisional staff, called for a newspaper, and on reading the news broke out into ostentatious laughter. At selected points the troops, on a whistle being sounded, fell into the parade or

“goose” step. Decidedly, the Bruxellois ought to be impressed. What resistance could avail against such instantaneous discipline?

In truth, the discipline was rather on the side of the spectators than of the performers. A proclamation by M. Max had enjoined a scrupulous avoidance of acts of insult or violence. The injunction was implicitly obeyed. Though, like every great city, Brussels had its irresponsible elements, such was the influence and authority of its burgomaster, and the esteem in which he was justly held, that his requisition was taken by every inhabitant as a personal obligation. The Germans imagined that this remarkable effect arose from their show of mechanical and material power. It was, on the contrary, a marvel of moral force.

The occupation, or more strictly the seizure, of the city was carried out methodically, and had manifestly, like the rest of the German arrangements, long been cut and dried. Detachments of troops took possession of the post and telephone offices; of the railways stations; of the public buildings; and of the barracks. At the Palais de Justice the doors were broken open, and the building turned into a military quarters. Brussels was cut off from communication

with the outside world, Germany excepted. Guards were placed along the roads leading from it, and no person was allowed to pass without a military permit. On the great open space in front of the Palais de Justice heavy guns were ranged so that they could command the greater part of the lower town. From this space, as everyone familiar with Brussels knows, the city, a picture of the multitudinous beauty of roofs and streets and towers, can be seen stretching away across the broad valley of the Senne.

One of the first measures taken by General von Arnim, the German commandant, was to summon the burgomaster and the members of the civic council, and to inform them that they must consider themselves hostages for the good behaviour of the citizens. A long list of the wealthiest citizens proved to be in the possession of the invaders, and opposite each name the approximate total of the person's fortune. Such was one of the effects of the spy system. Opposite each name, too, was the amount which it was proposed to exact.

The burgomaster was told that the city must pay a war "fine" of £8,000,000, and that he must see to it that the sum was forthcoming promptly and in cash. He was also told that he would be looked to for the

German soldiery being treated by Brussels citizens with proper respect. The police of the city would be left under his direction, subject, of course, to orders from the new authorities.

M. Max replied that a payment of £8,000,000 as demanded was out of the question. All the cash from the banks had been removed. In any event, if the levy was fairly assessed it must take time to collect. Hence at best it could only be paid by instalments. He added that measures had already been taken for the maintenance of public order, and that the occupying troops would meet with no molestation if they on their part behaved properly to the public. If he and the city council were to be responsible the civic rights and the persons and property of citizens must be respected.

The reply was that all this must be dependent on the amount of the fine being found somehow.

While this interview was in progress at the offices lately evacuated by the Government where the "conquerors" had installed themselves, arrangements were being made for billeting some thousands of officers, who promptly took possession of the hotels, where, with the arrogant air of superiority which marks off the Prussian military caste,

they proceeded to regale themselves without payment, adding to these acts of petty brigandage in many cases gross insults if their demands could not be complied with. Others were quartered on private families. During the evening of the first day of the occupation they sat at open windows or outside *cafés* on the boulevards, and refreshed with food and liquor beyond the dreams of their own exiguous commissariat, indulged in mocking observations on the manners and ways of citizens, who in the qualities of dignity, courtesy, and restraint offered an example which "kultur" had left the Prussian intruders unable to copy.

As for the troops not needed for garrison duty, they had been marched to an encampment to the north-west of the city. The delights of conquest were reserved for the officers. It was enough for the men that they shared the honour of its fatigues.

Two days later arrived from Berlin General von der Goltz who, it was announced, had been appointed civil governor of Belgium. This superannuated worthy brought with him instructions for more "fines," including the *modest* requisition of £18,000,000 from the province of Brabant.

It may be doubted whether the world, outside Germany, did not receive the news of

the levy upon Brussels with even greater laughter than indignation. The preposterous character of the demand was only exceeded by its impudence. But the new viceroy of Belgium, like his employers, took himself seriously. Having installed himself with due ceremony in the royal palace, he proceeded to tackle the knotty business of converting the phantom £10 a head for every man, woman, and child into solid sinews of war.

There was no sign of the money making its appearance. The burgomaster was sent for and carpeted for his remissness. He intimated with polite sarcasm that if the new "government" could discover a better way of collecting the fine they did not need his assistance. General von der Goltz agreed to accept payments by instalments. Hints were thrown out that if the instalments were not paid it would be the worse for Brussels. The "government" would not stand on ceremony.

Nevertheless, the instalments were not forthcoming. After huge worry and effort, all that could be extracted was £800,000. The policy of making Belgium pay for its own subjugation, brilliant in theory, threatened in practice to become a comedy.

This was not the only light touch. A col-

98 Hacking Through Belgium

league of von der Goltz, General von Luttwitz, had been appointed military governor of Belgium. He signalled his arrival by a pompous proclamation in which, after the manner of the 4,000 or more police by-laws of Berlin, he forbade the citizens to do a variety of things, and strictly enjoined them on pain of instant arrest and trial by court martial to do a variety of others.

The public read the proclamation with ridicule. Since it was both an interference with the rights of the civic council as the police authority, and likely to provoke mischief by its blundering foolishness, the burgomaster, in the interests of public order and security, issued a counter-proclamation reassuring citizens of the endeavours for their protection, and enjoining pacific conduct and restraint. The burgomaster's announcement, not having been submitted and passed in the first instance, was considered a defiance. German soldiers were sent out as billstickers with sheets of blank paper to cover it over. During the following night the blank paper was found to have been oiled, and made transparent. This produced a threat that if such a trick was repeated the police would be disbanded and replaced by the military.

As lacking in any sense of proportion was

the hurry to Germanise the Press. The Brussels newspapers, laid under a strict censorship, were forbidden to publish any save Berlin-provided war news, and to publish it in German. Henceforth the Brussels public were to hear of nothing save German victories. The newspapers declined to comply and were suppressed. To supply the lack of news the authorities established an official organ printed in the now official language. There was no demand, and the government and garrison alone enjoyed the pleasure afforded by its cultured and exciting contents. The Brussels public preferred to remain in unofficial darkness.

Familiarity with the "conquerors" rapidly bred in the population of the city a general contempt. It was speedily found out that their political incapacity was only paralleled by their assumption. Despite the elaborate imported machinery of government their authority remained a shadow. The passive resistance of the public was "correct," but annoying. When processions of street boys, each in an old hat with the end of a carrot pushed through the crown, played at German soldiers and gave comic imitations of the goose step and the words of command—a diversion General von Luttwitz had somehow forgotten to catalogue as "verboten"—the

100 Hacking Through Belgium

military government of Belgium felt itself drifting into a false position.

It was decided that the soul of the opposition was the burgomaster. Inevitably in the situation there was much distress arising from unemployment. The commerce of the city was at a standstill. M. Max, aided by other public-spirited citizens, worked with energy to organise relief. Brussels was divided into a score or so of districts, so that the most necessitous could be dealt with. The citizens had realised that by following the burgomaster's wise counsels, refraining from provocation on their own part, ignoring it on the part of their oppressors, they were serving their country as effectively as if they were on the battlefield. Indeed Brussels had become a battlefield—a moral battlefield on which the defeat of the foe was complete. On that battlefield in the dark days of the past the citizens of Brussels had won signal victory. Dark days had come again, and they were drawn together under the man raised up in the hour of need.

Whatever the show of power made by the combined civil and military governments of Belgium, the real ruler was the burgomaster, and the civil and military governments knew it. They tolerated him partly because it assisted public order, but mostly because he was

considered indispensable in collecting the expected war fine. The latter was dribbling in very slowly. Requisitions of supplies for the German troops were "paid for" in vouchers to be met out of the tribute—when received. Citizens shrewdly suspected, however, that, like other Prussian promises, these were of little value. This system of plunder of necessity aggravated the distress, and all the more because similar seizures were going on in the smaller towns. Every day in face of greater secrecy on the part of the population the collection of supplies became more difficult. General von Luttwitz was at his wits' end.

Bold measures were resolved upon. The troops in occupation showed signs of becoming demoralised. Quarrels broke out in barracks between contingents of Prussians and Bavarians. As co-religionists of the Belgians, the latter were suspected of being sympathetic to the Brussels people. The old standing hatred of the Bavarians towards Prussia, and the equally old-standing contempt of the Prussians for all other Germans in general and for Bavarians in particular, led to free fights in which bayonets were used. Some of the combatants lost their lives. The military government decidedly had its hands full.

It endeavoured to show its authority by insisting on the presence of a representative at the meetings of the City Council. There was a suspicion that these meetings were in fact occupied with proposals to subvert it, and evade payment of the fine. The indomitable burgomaster declared that if the new civil or the new military government intruded no more meetings would be held. The civil and military governments were obliged to give way.

By way of reprisal, they insisted that the £1,200,000 still owing out of the first £2,000,000 of the war fine should be paid up by a given date. The burgomaster and council replied that the demand was an impossible one. The new "authorities" were peremptory. The council met them with a flat refusal. On receipt of it the burgomaster was sent for by the military governor. He did not return, and in fact had been arrested. The council were informed that payment of the £1,200,000 was the condition of his release.

Forthwith on the walls and kiosks the public read over the signature of the military governor the following proclamation:—

"To the people of Brussels!

"I have the honour to make it known that I have found myself obliged to suspend

Burgomaster Max from his office on account of his unserviceable behaviour. He is now in honourable custody in a fortress.

“The German Government ordered the payment of all military requisition vouchers in the supposition that the town would pay the war tribute voluntarily. Only on this condition were special terms conceded to Brussels, whereas in other towns requisition vouchers will be paid after the conclusion of peace. As the Brussels municipality refuses to pay the remainder of the tribute, no further requisition vouchers will be paid by the German Government.”

The device which had been relied upon to cajole the public into the belief that the requisitions were being bought and not stolen had broken down, and the proclamation was nothing more than a confession of its failure. Henceforth the robbery must be crude and unashamed. As crude were the threats of outrage which the *competent* von Luttwitz indulged in. Summoning the aldermen into his presence and requiring them to elect another burgomaster, he found that the spirit of M. Adolphe Max, the ancient spirit of the Netherlands, was not to be destroyed by arrests. The aldermen firmly refused compliance. They were threatened with a German burgomaster and German military patrols in

place of the police, and told that if riots broke out Brussels would be bombarded and burned. Riots, as the aldermen knew, might readily be provoked for that purpose. Tension in face of the burgomaster's arrest was already acute. In these circumstances M. Maurice Lemonnier undertook with his colleagues the maintenance of public order, but the fiat for the election of a successor to M. Max remained unfulfilled.

Thus would-be conquerors of Europe in the face of unarmed citizens offered the world a proof of their inborn incapacity to rule, and themselves exposed the folly of their aspirations.

M. Max, it was afterwards learned, had been put under confinement in the fortress of Wesel in Germany.

CHAPTER VII

THE FINAL HACK

FROM Brussels by road to Mons is less than 40 miles; from Liége to Charleroi in the valley of the Sambre little more than 50. It is clear now that while one part of the great invading host took the direct route from Liége towards the Sambre, the other made a detour by way of Brussels to meet the Belgian army. The object was to strike towards the three great international roads running to Paris from Belgium. The most westerly of these great routes passes from Brussels through Mons and Valenciennes; the next through Charleroi and the French frontier fortress of Maubeuge; the third along the valley of the Meuse through Namur, past Dinant, and away to Laon. These brief facts on the topography of the country will help to explain the military operations. Briefly, if we imagine the march by way of Brussels as a bow, and the march direct from Liége as its string, we shall have a rough but

106 Hacking Through Belgium

fairly accurate idea of the movement executed; bearing in mind only that even the parts of a host of this magnitude, though the rear would be nearly two days' march behind the van, would each be pouring at once along adjacent roads leading in the same direction.

In any event, and quite apart from any opposition offered by the Belgians, with the delay resulting from it, the detour by way of Brussels involved an additional two days at least. But the fighting with the Belgians caused a further three days' delay. Of those days, two, certainly, were occupied in the battle, and the third in resting the troops engaged and in burying the dead. It was not, therefore, until August 23, five days after the start from Liége, that the forces, in fact, concentrated at the opposite end of the bow in southern Belgium.

Only a small part of them, as we have seen, passed through Brussels. The main body, even of the northern division, marched through Tirlemont and on to Hal, round the south of the capital. At the same time, the enormous column of cavalry, acting as a screen, rode round by the north of the city and then struck south through Enghien.

All the military display at Brussels was relatively but an aside to the main performance, intended both for moral effect, such as

it was, and to throw dust in the eyes of the enemy.

We have therefore to imagine between August 21 and August 23 these great, and, from their size, inevitably unwieldy, forces concentrating towards the southern frontier of Belgium by every road available.

Here another brief note on geography is necessary. Eastern Belgium, or that part of it between the Meuse and the sea, is nearly all perfectly flat, and almost purely agricultural, and the invaders had there marched through a country which, before they laid it waste, was a habitation of industry and peace rejoicing in the bounties of harvest.

But western Belgium is largely a manufacturing country, though still marked by rich rural beauty. Even the main Belgian coal-field extending through the provinces of Hainault and West Flanders presents outwardly few of those evidences of utilitarian squalor commonly associated with coal and iron. The centre of the coal and iron industries of Western Belgium is Mons, a quaint old place built upon a hill rising amid a country thickly intersected by canals and railways. Looking east from Mons, we are looking down the valley of the Sambre, on each side low rolling hills, the sides and crests of which are in part clothed

108 Hacking Through Belgium

with woods and plantations. These hills are, so to say, the outworks of the Ardennes, one of the natural show-places of Europe. Fifteen miles from Mons, and on the north bank of the Sambre, is the town of Charleroi. Fifteen miles farther, at the juncture of the Sambre with the Meuse, rises the rocky mass forming the ancient citadel of Namur. The Sambre is not a wide stream, but is swift, its course alternating between rapids and deep pools. It is most passable, in the military sense, about ten miles west of Namur. Just there the river follows a succession of sharp bends.

Of the huge land Armada now moving south through this busy and populous but beautiful country, most people think as being in every sense a modern European army. But it was not. There were surgeons with it, but no field hospitals. It had encumbered itself with no tents. There was all the grim apparatus of modern war, but only the least possible of modern war's humane apparatus. It was the intention of those who could to quarter themselves on the population of the country through which the host passed; to supplement food supplies by eating up the country's resources. The mass of the invaders slept, where other shelter was not to be had, in the fields. These hardships

sharpened the lust of conquest. At the rear of the host trudged battalions of grave-diggers. But they were to dig the graves of those who would dare to stand against it. The comparative poverty and the native parsimony of the Prussians was reflected in these arrangements. Their all had been invested in artillery and instruments of death because the leaders of the host were sure of victory. What else they needed when winter came would be provided from the spoil of the conquered. In appearance a modern army, it presented essential features in common with the migrations of Huns and Goths, which form in Europe the history of the early Middle Ages. Under a modern disguise, it was a similar horde. It is easy, therefore, to estimate the rage and surprise which thwarted hopes, wounded pride, and heavy losses had produced in Belgium, and why there was behind it a land of mourning and blood.

We now come to the military movements. The 5th French army and two divisions had advanced and had occupied the angle of country between the Meuse and the Sambre, and held the passages over both rivers; the British line was taken up behind the canal which runs from Condé on the west of Mons to Binche on the east. Mons lay somewhat

110 Hacking Through Belgium

in advance of the position, and occupied by the British 3rd division commanded by General Hamilton, formed an outward angle, or, in military terms, a salient.

The 5th British cavalry division under General Sir Philip Chetwode had been sent forward to reconnoitre. Part of the force had, on August 22, advanced as far as the forest of Soignies, close to Brussels. In face of the cavalry covering the German advance they had fallen back. Similar reconnaissances were made by the French cavalry round Gembloux to the north of Namur. Hence during the German advance southward from Brussels and westward of Namur the hostile forces were in touch with each other.

An interesting episode, characteristic of the scouting tactics of the Germans, is related by Mr. A. Beaumont, the special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, who was at the time in Charleroi:—

On my return to Charleroi I learnt that a detachment of twenty Hussars of the Death's Head, led by an officer, had entered the upper town at seven in the morning. They proceeded towards the Sambre, and quietly said, "Good-morning" to the people at the doors. "Bon jour, bon jour," they said to the housewives, who were looking

on in wonder, and who, mistaking their khaki uniform, took them for English soldiers.

People even enthusiastically raised cheers for England. The soldiers, also misled, allowed them to pass. An officer finally saw them from a window, and rushed down to a detachment on guard in the Rue Pont Neuf, and gave the alarm. A number of infantry soldiers at once opened fire on them. It was at the corner of the Rue De Montigny, where the tramway and railway lines pass.

Three of the intruders were shot down. The rest, with their officer, took to flight. It was not believed that such a thing would be possible, but it proved that the Germans are capable of anything. They did the same thing many a time in 1870.

Apart from cavalry skirmishes, the fighting began on August 22, when the Germans attacked the passages over the Sambre about 10 miles to the west of Namur, already alluded to. Here reference may be made to a ruse on their part which explains the peculiarity of their movement across Belgium. The southern contingent was hurried into action evidently in order to lead the Allies to believe that it formed the bulk of the German force. After the Allies had made their dispositions to resist on that footing, the northern contingent was unex-

pectedly to appear, and to finish and win the battle by the weight of its forces.

While the fighting was going on for the passages of the Sambre, another part of the southern contingent, which was formed by the army apparently of General von Bülow, moved on to attack Charleroi, and yet another part, an army corps and a cavalry division, appeared before Mons.

The opening attack upon Mons, however, was what, in common parlance, is called a "blind," intended to screen the advance behind it of the northern contingent, the army of General von Kluck, consisting of the pick of the Prussian troops.

For it is known now that that commander had marched south from Brussels having in his pocket an Army Order issued by the German Emperor from headquarters at Aix-la-Chapelle, under date August 19, which contained the following passage:—

It is my royal and imperial command that you concentrate your energies for the immediate present upon one single purpose, and that is that you address all your skill and all the valour of my soldiers to exterminate first the treacherous English and to walk over General French's contemptible army.

What happened, therefore, on the arrival

of these troops on that Sunday, August 23, was, briefly told, this. While the British troops holding Mons were resisting the opening attack on that place, an attack they readily defeated, the onslaught suddenly developed in great weight and fury. In face of it, the necessity arose of withdrawing the troops forming the British salient into line with the rest of the army.

This, in the face of such an attack by overwhelming numbers, was a most difficult and dangerous operation. It was carried out, however, with remarkable coolness and courage. Though the British suffered heavy losses, the masses thrown up against them failed to break their formations.

The attack thereupon developed all along the British line. Throughout that day, and far into the succeeding night, the German officers and men did their utmost faithfully to carry out the royal and imperial orders, and it is not too much to say that German arrogance met with the sharpest shock it had until then experienced. In the front of the British positions German dead lay in masses, and, after their custom, they left their wounded for the most part to perish. The unerring marksmanship of the British infantry was as unexpected as it was deadly; unshaken by the terrific artillery fire, the

British troops met the attacks thrown upon them in mass formation with a withering hail of lead. Where, with an intensity of contempt and hate the onslaught succeeded momentarily in getting close in, the British dashed into it with the bayonet, and "the valour of my soldiers" wilted under the slaughter. Again and again the German rank and file were led or driven by their officers upon the British positions, again and again to be ripped into bloody confusion. They had come up against the unconquerable.

While these events were in progress, word was received of a formidable German turning movement in the direction of Tournai, held by a body of French troops of the second line. This made advisable a retirement of the British to the rear. Thanks alike to the rock-like steadiness combined with the inbred tenacity of the infantry, the heavy hitting power of the artillery, and not least the dauntless devotion of the cavalry, who faced and broke the heavy odds of the German horse, the movement was successfully accomplished.

It is not the purpose here to tell the story of the British retreat from Mons. That feat of arms is related in another volume of this series. All that comes within present scope is to glance briefly over the other happenings

of these eventful days along that line of battle.

Although in the struggle for the passages of the Sambre the Germans on the night of August 22 had succeeded in throwing troops across, they were long and heavily punished by the French artillery, which now, for the first time, clearly demonstrated the superiority destined to have so marked an effect during the war. The French field gun was a new type of weapon, better than the German alike in rapidity and accuracy of fire. Its more perfect rifling gave a higher muzzle velocity and a flatter trajectory; the melinite shells used were of intense explosive force, and the French gunners handled their guns with skill. A larger proportion of the German artillery consisted of guns of, as it proved, a relatively out-of-date type, retained and "converted," apparently, from motives of economy.

Crossing a river in the face of an enemy so supported is a costly business, as the Germans soon discovered. With their heavy advantage in numbers, and with at least four points of simultaneous attack strongly in their favour, they should have been across in very little time. They were held at bay for many hours, and repeatedly driven back by French charges. Only at length under cover

116 Hacking Through Belgium

of darkness were they able to gain a footing on the south bank.

Meanwhile, the assault was being pressed against Charleroi, and here was the centre and decisive point. The French held the place against repeated attacks, until the regiments of the Prussian Guard, always held in reserve for critical operations, and reputed invincible, were brought up against it. There are 20 regiments of the guard, each 3,000 strong. The French were driven out. In turn they launched against the town the infantry of their African Army Corps, the not less famous Zouaves and Turcos; and that Sunday afternoon witnessed one of the most terrible bayonet fights in the history of Europe, a fight in which the little Belgian town and its environs became a hell. Amid a cannonade too appalling for description men fought through its streets until the ways were heaped with dying and dead. Charleroi was set on fire by shells, but the combat, which knew no truce, went on amid blazing buildings and collapsing walls. It was a combat of men turned devils.

The town was taken and retaken. At the finish it remained in the hands of the invaders, but thousands of the flower of their army lay amid and around its ruins.

The battle of Mons and Charleroi was a

Pyrrhic victory. One decisive advantage, however, on that day the invaders had won. They had captured the fortress of Namur.

After the heroic defence of Liège the rapid fall of Namur formed one of the surprises of the campaign. The fortress was held by a Belgian garrison of some 26,000 men, and well provisioned. Though so far as natural situation goes a strong place, surrounded by a ring of four larger and five smaller forts, in which the guns were protected by armoured turrets of a type similar to those at Liège, it had some serious weak spots.

As secretly as possible and during the night-time the Germans had transported from Liège batteries of their huge howitzers, and had planted these on already prepared beds of concrete in positions beyond the range of the fortress artillery. It had been decided to renew the ordnance of the forts, and the guns had been ordered, according to report, though this lacks authority, from Germany. At all events the newer and heavier ordnance was not there. It may here be explained that an attack is rarely or never made upon a hostile fortress without the general in command of the attack and his principal officers being put into possession of plans of the works. These plans, the result of espionage, show every detail, and afford every par-

118 Hacking Through Belgium

ticular; disclose every trench, entanglement, and obstacle, every building, wireless instalment, or line of telegraph and telephone wire. The exact range and power of every gun is stated. Between the field of fire of the guns there are spaces, known technically as "dead points," left uncovered, or at all events, the facts being disclosed, such dispositions for attack as will create "dead points" are readily made by drawing the fire of the forts in particular directions.

Now the defence of Liége was successful because the entrenchments and obstacles in the sectors between the forts were made when their details could not be disclosed to the enemy. But Namur had been prepared about the same time, and there was ample opportunity to discover the particulars.

All the Germans therefore had to do was to wait for the first autumn mist among the hills to open fire from guns whose position the defence did not know. To the attack the "laying" of such guns to hit any desired object in the fortress was, with the plans in their possession, a mere matter of mathematical calculation. Under cover of such a mist, the forts being unable to reply, to knock some of them to pieces by a heavily concentrated fire, and after that to stalk the place was comparatively easy. The

garrison were aware that the fortress was untenable, or only to be held by meeting the attack by a counter-attack. Following a terrific two days' bombardment, during which two of the forts were demolished, the assault was launched on the afternoon of August 23. The garrison after a short resistance against great odds were driven out. The mist which had favoured the attack equally favoured their escape. They found their way fortunately into the French lines.*

* A story published at Berlin gives the account sent in a letter from Lieut. von der Linde, of the Potsdam Guards, of how he carried out the capture of Fort Malonne at Namur. The lieutenant states that he was ordered to advance on the fort with 500 men by a route where mines were suspected. He advanced with four men on the bridge across the moat of the fort, and called upon the commander to surrender immediately, threatening him that otherwise the artillery would at once begin to bombard the fort. The commander, taken by surprise, allowed the lieutenant and his four men to enter and surrendered his sword. Besides the commander, five officers and twenty men were taken prisoners. The remainder of the garrison, consisting of 400 men, had escaped. Four heavy guns and considerable war material were captured. For this exploit Lieut. von der Linde received from the Kaiser the Order of Merit, and it is recorded that he was the youngest officer in the German service to receive that distinction. He was only twenty-two. No reference is made in this account to the mist and rain which alone could have made such an adventure possible, much less successful. The story illustrates the difficulty of defending, under the conditions described, a fortress situated among hills, and also the facilities offered for escape.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRIME OF LOUVAIN

ON August 20, the day before the formal entry of the German forces into Brussels, the Belgians had evacuated Malines. It was deemed prudent, as in fact it was, to withdraw the forces to the line of the outer forts of Antwerp. Some of the most violent fighting on August 19 and 20 had taken place 16 miles to the south-east of Antwerp at Aerschot. There the Germans had made their determined, but unsuccessful, effort to cross the Dyle.

Once in occupation of Brussels, they turned Malines into the headquarters of the troops, an army corps some 60,000 strong, told off to "mask" Antwerp by keeping the Belgian army if possible cooped up within the fortress. Malines lies exactly halfway between Antwerp and Brussels, about 12 miles from either city. It is, however, not more than half a mile from the outer ring

of the Antwerp fortifications. The value of such a watch-tower to the Germans is manifest. No movement could possibly be made by the Belgians from Antwerp without the invaders knowing of it.

No sooner, however, had the march of the German main forces southward from Brussels begun, than the Belgians sallied forth. They were well-informed of the enemy's movements, and were fully aware that, acting in conjunction with the contingent moving from Liége direct to the Sambre, that moving by way of Brussels could not in any event turn back.

This sortie, made so soon—it took place on August 23—took the German troops in Malines by surprise. They were just beginning to make themselves comfortable after their fatigues, when the Belgian army burst in upon them. No effectual resistance was possible. The invaders were driven, a battered rout, as far as Vilvorde, a northern suburb of Brussels. There most of the 10,000 German troops forming the garrison of Brussels were drawn up to cover the retreat. Malines remained in the hands of the Belgians.

Realising from this defeat that they had a tough proposition in front of them, the Germans hurried additional troops into the

country. Meanwhile the Belgians had again seized Aerschot, Termonde and Alost. The German force threatening Ghent had to be withdrawn, and the invaders found themselves in danger of being cooped up in the capital.

This situation throws light on the atrocities which almost immediately followed, and on the question of whether these atrocities were accidents of hasty indiscipline or were, in fact, military measures carried out according to a settled plan.

A glance at the map of Belgium will show that the towns of Jodoigne, Louvain, Malines, Termonde, and Alost form round Brussels an arc, rather more than a semi-circle. The middle point of that arc is the point nearest to Antwerp, that is to say, Malines.

Now these towns as well as Aerschot were destroyed with the exceptions of Malines and Alost. Though Malines was three times severely bombarded by the Germans, and in the succeeding struggles changed hands as many times over, it was, while deplorably damaged, not destroyed. Neither was Alost. Why? Because Malines was needed as a *point d'appui* against Antwerp, and Alost as a half-way position on the road to Ghent. Alost was also the scene of repeated struggles. It is beyond argument to suggest

that this destruction of some places and not of others can have been haphazard.

When we look further into the military situation the question passes beyond all doubt. Entrenched at Antwerp the as yet undefeated Belgian main army remained a serious menace. In fact, the Germans both at Berlin and at Brussels were well aware that, so long as that state of things continued, their hold upon the country was, not only precarious, but, in the event of a reverse in France, to the last degree dangerous. For, in possession of Antwerp and the seaboard provinces, the Belgians might, in conjunction with the Allies, at once close the only door of escape, and force at Aix-la-Chapelle what is, in effect, the main door to Germany.

From the invaders' point of view, therefore, it was essential both to restrict the operations of the Belgian forces and to affirm their own grip on Brussels. And this explains why the threats indulged in to bombard and burn Brussels were merely threats. In a city of 800,000 people, numbers of whom, doubtless, secretly possessed arms, a rising on the part of the population, with a native army of nearly 100,000 men only a few miles away, meant a risk of the garrison of Brussels and even of

the occupying troops altogether having to defend themselves against extermination, for the hatred they had inspired was unspeakable.

The plan resolved upon, it was carried out without mercy. Owing to its ancient renown, and the world-wide interest of its buildings and monuments, the destruction of Louvain has most shocked civilised peoples. The loss is a loss to the world, but as regards its utter inhumanity, the razing of the other towns, not to speak of the villages surrounding them, was equally pitiless and savage. In these murders the German soldiery spared neither age nor sex, and wreaked upon the most helpless their most indescribable and debased barbarities. It has been said that for every Belgian soldier killed in action, they slew three unarmed men, women, or children.

In the devastated districts the bodies of murdered peasants lay unburied in ditches by the roadside. The corpses of children, stiff in death, clung in their last attitude of terror to the corpses of their mutilated mothers. Others lay amid the roofless ruins of their homes. There were instances in which women were stripped, outraged by brutal soldiery, hanged from the branches of trees, and disembowelled in mockery of their final

agony. Those who could escaped into the woods, where they hid without food or shelter. Numbers died of starvation and exposure. To destroy the last chance of life for these fugitives, and to avoid the trouble of hunting them out, corpses of murdered people were thrown into wells in order to poison the water.*

As might be expected, troops capable of such enormities were, as combatants, of little value. Well disciplined soldiers could not be driven to such excesses. Though their greater numbers, when reinforced, enabled the invaders to make headway against the native troops, yet in every encounter between anything like equal forces they were always decisively defeated, and without exception suffered losses out of all proportion to those they were able to inflict.

It was after an encounter having these results that, on August 25, a body of these demoralised ruffians burned Louvain. They sallied out of that place with the object of driving the Belgians from Aerschot and beyond the Dyle. They were repulsed, and chased back almost to the outskirts of Louvain, sustaining on the way, as usual, a

* See, among other evidence, the details collected by and given in the Fifth Report of the Belgian Official Commission of Inquiry.

galling fire on both flanks. It has been suggested that the officer in command,* whose competence is sufficiently measured by the adventure, gave the order to sack and destroy the town in order to disguise the indiscipline of his troops. The motive assigned is not easy to accept. According to the statement for which the Belgian Government made itself responsible—a statement based on evidence which inquiry has not left open to doubt:—

The German armed guard at the entrance to the town mistook the nature of this incursion, and fired on their routed fellow-countrymen, taking them for Belgians. In spite of all denials from the authorities, the Germans, in order to cover their mistake, pretended that it was the inhabitants who had fired on them, whereas the inhabitants, including the police, had all been disarmed more than a week before.

Without inquiry and without listening to any protest, the German commander announced that the town would immediately be destroyed. The inhabitants were ordered to leave their dwellings; part of the men were made prisoners; the women and children

* Alleged to be a Major von Manteuffel. In a German Official Inquiry afterwards held at Brussels an officer of that name was reported to have been cashiered for this affair; but it is doubtful if he was more than an official scapegoat.

put into trains of which the destination is unknown.

Soldiers, furnished with bombs, set fire to all parts of the town. The splendid church of St. Pierre, the University buildings, the Library, and the scientific establishments were delivered to the flames. Several notable citizens were shot.

The town of 45,000 inhabitants, the intellectual metropolis of the Low Countries since the fifteenth century, is now no more than a heap of ashes.

Such is the brief official statement. It was, however, but the palest reflection of the facts. How scrupulously restrained the Belgian Government were in framing it, is shown from the accounts given by eye-witnesses of the tragedy.

One of these, a Dutchman who owed his escape to the possession of papers proving his nationality, and afterwards reached Breda, told his experiences:—

On Tuesday, the 25th, many troops left the town. We had a few soldiers in our house. At six o'clock, when everything was ready for dinner, alarm signals sounded, and the soldiers rushed through the streets, shots whistled through the air, cries and groans arose on all sides; but we did not dare leave our house, and took refuge in the cellar, where we stayed through long and fearful

hours. Our shelter was lighted up by the reflection from the burning houses. The firing continued unceasingly, and we feared that at any moment our house would be burnt over our heads. At break of day I crawled from the cellar to the street door, and saw nothing but a raging sea of fire.

At nine o'clock the shooting diminished, and we resolved to make a dash to the station. Abandoning our home and all our goods except what we could carry, and taking all the money we had, we rushed out. What we saw on our way to the station is hardly describable. Everything was burning, the streets were covered with bodies shot dead and half-burnt. Everywhere proclamations had been posted, summoning every man to assist in quenching the flames, and the women and children to stay inside the houses. The station was crowded with fugitives, and I was just trying to show an officer my legitimation papers when the soldiers separated me from my wife and children.

All protests were useless, and a lot of us were marched off to a big shed in the goods yard, from where we could see the finest buildings of the city, the most beautiful historical monuments, being burned down.

Shortly afterwards German soldiers drove before them 300 men and lads to the corner of the Boulevard van Tienen and the Maria Theresa-street, opposite the Café Vermalen. There they were shot. The sight filled us

with horror. The Burgomaster, two magistrates, the Rector of the University, and all police officials had been shot already.

With our hands bound behind our backs we were then marched off by the soldiers, still without having seen our wives or children. We went through the *Juste de Litsh*-street, along the *Diester Boulevard*, across the *Vaart* and up the hill.

From the *Mont Cesar* we had a full view of the burning town, *St. Peter* in flames, while the troops incessantly sent shot after shot into the unfortunate town. We came through the village of *Herent*—one single heap of ruins—where another troop of prisoners, including half-a-dozen priests, joined us. Suddenly, about ten o'clock, evidently as the result of some false alarm, we were ordered to kneel down, and the soldiers stood behind us with their rifles ready to fire, using us as a shield. But fortunately for us nothing happened..

After a delay of half an hour, our march was continued. No conversation was allowed, and the soldiers continually maltreated us. One soldier struck me with all his might with the heavy butt-end of his rifle. I could hardly walk any further, but I had to. We were choked with thirst, but the Germans wasted their drinking water without offering us a drop.

At seven o'clock we arrived at *Camperhout*, *en route* for *Malines*. We saw many

half-burnt bodies—men, women, and children. Frightened to death and half-starved we were locked up in the church, and then later joined by another troop of prisoners from the surrounding villages.

At ten o'clock the church was lighted up by burning houses. Again shots whistled through the air, followed by cries and groans.

At five o'clock next morning, all the priests were taken out by the soldiers and shot together with eight Belgian soldiers, six cyclists, and two gamekeepers. Then the officer told us that we could go back to Louvain. This we did, but only to be recaptured by other soldiers, who brought us back to Camperhout. From there we marched to Malines, not by the high road, but along the river. Some of the party fell into the water, but all were rescued. After thirty-six hours of ceaseless excitement and danger we arrived at Malines, where we were able to buy some food, and from there I escaped to Holland. I still do not know where my wife and children are.*

Another witness was Mr. Gerald Morgan, an American resident at Brussels. His narrative, given after his eventual arrival in England by way of Louvain, was published in the *Daily Telegraph* on September 3. He made a tour over the German line of march

* The narrative was given to Reuter's special correspondent at Rotterdam.

and found their wounded scattered through every town and village not yet destroyed. In the absence of any German field hospitals, these men were left in any buildings available to be removed as far as possible back to Germany in returning supply wagons, 'buses or motor-cars. To calculate their number was very difficult. Mr. Morgan goes on to say:—

After this I returned to Brussels, and we Americans in Brussels then decided that it was time we shook the soil of the country from our feet. We found that we could return to England on a troop-train, viâ Louvain, Liège, and Aix-la-Chapelle, and thence over the Dutch border. A question arose as to how long the train would stop at Louvain, but on the following morning the German staff office at the railway station said, "You won't stop at Louvain, as Louvain was being destroyed." We left at three o'clock, the train stopping with abominable jerks every few minutes, like a German soldier saluting. We began to see signs of destruction in the outlying villages shortly before we reached Louvain. Houses in the villages were in flames.

An hour before sunset we entered Louvain, and found the city a smoking furnace. The railway station was crowded with troops, drunk with loot and liquor, and rapine as well. From house to house, acting under

orders, groups of soldiers were carrying lighted straw, placing it in the basement, and then passing it on to the next. It was not one's idea of a general conflagration, for each house burnt separately—hundreds of individual bonfires—while the sparks shot up like thousands of shooting stars into the still night air. It was exactly like a display of fireworks or Bengal lights, and set pieces, at a grand display in Coney Island.

Meanwhile, through the station arch we saw German justice being administered. In a square outside, where the cabs stand, an officer stood, and the soldiers drove the citizens of Louvain into his presence, like so many unwilling cattle on a market day. Some of the men, after a few words between the officer and the escorts, were marched off under fixed bayonets behind the railway station. Then we heard volleys, and the soldiers returned. Then the train moved out, and the last we saw of the doomed city was an immense red glare in the gathering darkness. My impressions after Louvain were just as if I had read and dreamt of one of Zola's novels.

Weighing this evidence, it is not possible to resist the conclusion that the atrocity of Louvain was planned and carried out deliberately and in cold blood, and it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the trivial conflict between the German armed guard and their

retreating troops, a conflict which apparently hurt nobody on either side, was pre-arranged in order to afford a colourable excuse. It has been alleged that the troops forming the guard were drunk, and that they had just turned out on the alarm being sounded, after a debauch following the sack of a brewery. There is no present proof that the sack of the brewery had anything to do with the affair, or that the connection was anything more than an afterthought.

The inference of a plan is strengthened, not only by the method with which, as Mr. Morgan shows, the destruction and its accompanying "military executions" were completed, but by the provocation which had previously been offered to the inhabitants, but offered, as it proved, without the evidently expected effect.

On the latter point the statement of the escaped Dutch resident already quoted is circumstantial, and since this is not a Belgian witness, his relation may be accepted as un-biassed. He says:—

Before the Germans entered the town the Civic Guard had been disarmed, and all weapons in the possession of the population had to be given up. Even toy guns and toy pistols and precious collections of old weapons, bows and arrows, and other antique

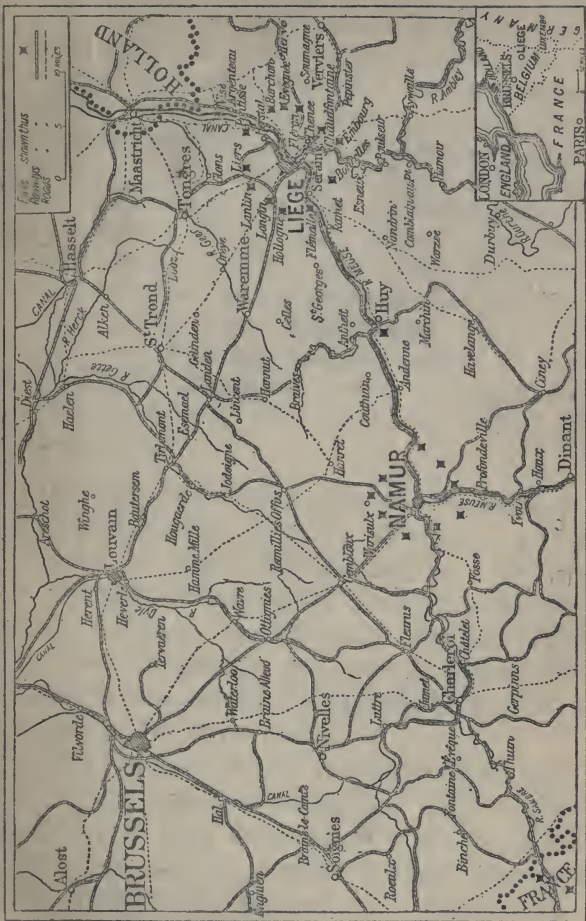
134 Hacking Through Belgium

arms useless for any kind of modern warfare had to be surrendered, and all these things—sometimes of great personal value to the owner—have since been destroyed by the Germans. The value of one single private collection has been estimated at about £1,000. From the pulpits the priests urged the people to keep calm, as that was the only way to prevent harm being done to them.

A few days after the entry of the German troops the military authority agreed to cease quartering their men in private houses, in return for a payment of 100,000 francs (£4,000) per day. On some houses between forty and fifty men had been billeted. After the first payment of the voluntary contribution the soldiers camped in the open or in the public buildings. The beautiful rooms in the Town Hall, where the civil marriages take place, were used as a stable for cavalry horses.

At first everything the soldiers bought was paid for in cash or promissory notes, but later this was altered. Soldiers came and asked for change, and when this was handed to them they tendered in return for the hard cash a piece of paper—a kind of receipt.

All the houses abandoned by their owners were ransacked, notwithstanding the warnings from the military authorities forbidding the troops to pillage. The Germans imprisoned as hostages of war the Burgomaster, two magistrates, and a number of influential citizens.



COPYRIGHT, SPECIALLY PREPARED FOR The Daily Telegraph BY GEOGRAPHIA, LTD

On Sunday, the 23rd, I and some other influential people in the town were roused from our beds. We were informed that an order had been given that 250 mattresses, 200 lb. of coffee, 250 loaves of bread, and 500 eggs must be on the market-place within an hour. On turning out we found the Burgomaster standing on the market-place, and crowds of citizens, half naked, or in their night attire, carrying everything they could lay hands on to the market, that no harm might befall their Burgomaster. After this had been done the German officer in command told us that his orders had been misinterpreted, and that he only wanted the mattresses.

On this, it is clear that the townspeople did everything possible to avoid giving offence to these brutal enemies. On the other hand, it is equally clear that the German military "authorities" issued orders against pillage by the troops, which were taken by the latter, and must have been well known to be, hypocritical.

The proofs as to the real responsibility for this foul deed are irresistible. The soldiers of Alva at their worst never perpetrated any horror so utterly cowardly. They were fired by the fury of religious zeal. Blindly mistaken and politically disastrous as it proved to be, it was a motive worthy of respect by

the side of the stupid hate and the mean fear born of the grovelling and greedy materialism of these "conquerors."

The destroyers saved the incomparable town hall, because they destined it to be an ornament of a Germanised Belgium. The rest of the town, however, and more particularly the older part of it, was reduced to a blackened ruin, from which, as from other burning towns, arose a mighty cloud of smoke. Doubtless it was hoped that this spectacle, visible from Antwerp, as well as from Brussels, would strike terror into the people. What they could not gain by arms the Germans sought to gain by the devices of barbarity. But a Nemesis waits on this mode of "warfare." It is related by Lamartine that after their subjugation of Servia the Turks collected into a pyramid the skulls of the slain. This ghastly monument, situated in a desolate valley, the scene of a great battle, was intended as an everlasting warning. To the Serbs it became a remembrance of the price their fathers had been willing to pay for liberty: a revered national memorial which kept alive the spirit which at last crushed their oppressors.

In the same way, the oppressors of Belgium fanned the fires of resistance. In the library of the University of Louvain they

had destroyed ancient Greek, Hebrew, and Oriental texts and manuscripts of priceless value; they had not destroyed the valour of one Belgian heart. They had laid in ashes a place which had rightly been called by Lipsius the Belgian Athens, and had earned the praise and admiration of philosophers from Erasmus to Sir William Hamilton; they had but enhanced the glory of the town where, while Northern Europe was still covered by intellectual night, and "kultur" had not yet shed its radiance on Germany, nor contributed to produce a Prussian army, a community of mere weavers had, first among the municipalities of Europe, founded out of their hard earnings, a seat of philosophy, science, and the arts, and in its twenty-eight colleges, the nurseries of many famous men, for centuries led the way in their cultivation. Its university buildings and its library; its art treasures*; its Academy of Painting; its

* Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* of the destroyed art treasures of Louvain, Sir Claude Phillips says: "The chief treasures of the church of Saint-Pierre de Louvain were two famous paintings by Dierick (or Thierry) Bouts, who is as closely identified with the now, destroyed university city of Belgium as are the Van Eycks with Ghent and Bruges, and Roger van der Weyden with Tournay and Brussels. The earlier of these paintings is (or rather was) the remarkable triptych with the Martyrdom of St. Erasmus in the central panel, and the figures of St. Jerome and St. Bernard in the wings. This was seen at the Bruges retrospective exhibition of 1904. But perhaps the masterpiece of Dierick Bouts,

140 Hacking Through Belgium

School of Music; its Museum of National History had been committed to the flames at

and certainly one of the finest examples of Flemish fifteenth-century art, was the polyptych painted by him for the altar of the Holy Sacrament in the collegiate church of Saint-Pierre.

“The central panel of this work, whereupon was represented the Last Supper, was, until a few days ago, the chief adornment of that church and of the ancient city. One of the most accomplished writers on modern Netherlandish art, M. Fiérens-Gevaert, has written thus of this ‘Last Supper,’ by Bouts: ‘*La Cène est une des œuvres les plus profondes, les mieux peintes du XV^{me} siècle, et si l’on dressait une liste des cinq ou six chefs-d’œuvre de nos primitifs, il faudrait l’y comprendre.*’ And in committing this act of hideous, wanton violence, this crime for which posterity will refuse to find words of pardon or excuse, the Prussian commander has also been guilty of an act of incredible ignorance, of boundless stupidity. For, strange to say, the splendid wings which once completed this famous altarpiece, and would, if a reconstruction could have been effected, have caused Bouts’s polyptych to stand forth one of the most important works of Flemish fifteenth-century art in existence—these wings are in Germany. In the *Alte Pinakothek* of Munich are preserved the ‘Gathering of the Manna’ and the ‘Meeting of Abraham and Melchisedech.’

“In the *Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum* of Berlin are to be found ‘The Prophet Elijah in the Desert’ and the ‘Feast of Passover.’ It would obviously have been far better to steal this ‘Last Supper,’ this central jewel of the doomed city’s pictorial adornment, to confide it either to Munich or to Berlin, than thus to blot it out for ever. It would have been cruel, iniquitous, to despoil heroic Belgium; it is infamous, and, above all, it is stupid to tear out the heart of a masterpiece, to rob the world, and in punishing Belgium to punish Germany, to punish Europe. Napoleon, the ruthless plunderer of museums and churches, was mild and humane in comparison. If he stole, whether under forcibly imposed treaty or by sheer brute force, the accepted masterpieces of painting and sculptur belonging to the States which he overcame, he stole with a certain reverence; much as the believer steals the most sacred treasures from the temple, or the most precious relics of the Passion and the saints from the church or the tomb. Robber though

the hands of rabble soldiery, urged on by still more degraded officers, but the brand applied was applied to their own country, whose good name they had burned from among nations.

he was, he worshipped in awe-struck delight the masterpieces which he tore from the nations; and his triumphant fellow-countrymen, during the brief period of his supremacy, worshipped with him.

“Not less than ourselves must the students, the gallery directors, the art historians of Germany suffer, compelled as they are to look on helpless at this incredible act of sacrilege. It is they, indeed, who have most contributed to place before the world in their right perspective, to estimate at their true value the greatest examples of Netherlandish art in its early prime. It is their galleries which contain the most complete collections of these early Netherlandish masters. We challenge them to defy in this, if in this only, the ‘mailed fist’—to come forward and register their solemn protest against the greatest outrage upon civilisation, upon humanity, that the modern world has been called upon to witness.”

CHAPTER IX

THE POLITICS OF RAPINE

To follow in detail the operations from now of the Belgian forces from day to day would be less informing than to sum up their plan and their effect.

As it stood on August 25 the situation was that the Belgians held all the country to the north of the Scheldt and the Dyle, and the Germans all the country to the south of these rivers. From Turcoing on the French frontier to Antwerp, the Scheldt follows a course roughly parallel to the coast. At Antwerp its bed describes a sharp bend to seaward. Some ten miles south of this bend, the main waterway receives the Rupel, formed by the junction to the eastward of the Dyle and the Nethe. Taken together, the Scheldt and the Dyle, both deep, sluggish watercourses, offer a natural defence of the seaboard provinces.

From behind this natural line of defence the Belgians, ceaselessly on the watch, sallied forth at every chance offered, to harass and

entrap the enemy. Sudden dashes were made upon his communications by armed motor-cars; attacks were made upon railway lines and bridges; his convoys were unexpectedly attacked and cut up by superior forces; in a word, he was kept in perpetual hot water.

The military effect of this was more important than may at first sight appear. In the first place, it was made necessary for the Germans, not only to keep heavy forces afoot in Belgium, but to disperse those forces. Hence though the forces, taken together, were large, the Belgians concentrated on Antwerp were in a position to deliver in superior strength a blow at any one of these bodies, and thus to worst the whole of them in detail.

In the second place, these Parthian tactics made the transport of munitions and supplies to the German armies in France by the line through Brussels a business calling for vigilance and caution. That greatly lessened the value of the line to the enemy. On this supply line the German right wing in France mainly depended. The Belgians, therefore, were not merely defending their own country, but indirectly were aiding the French and British operations on the farther side of the French frontier.

Now the weakness of the Belgian position

144 Hacking Through Belgium

was that, while they could hold the line of the Dyle and that of the Scheldt as far as Termonde, their force was too small to bar the passage of the Scheldt farther west. It was open to the Germans, by seizing Ghent, to turn the defensive position in a manner that would speedily have become dangerous. Well aware of this, the Germans advanced upon Ghent. Coincidentally, however, the Belgian operations farther east became more active and threatening. To meet them, the Germans were obliged to withdraw most of the troops sent to Ghent. Just at that juncture (August 27) a body of British marines was landed at Ostend. From Ghent the enemy had hastily to withdraw. British troops advanced to Ghent, and the whole line of the Scheldt was secured.

The value of that move is clear. From behind the line of the Scheldt, the Allied forces were within easy striking distance of the main railways south of Brussels. Later on, and at a critical juncture for the German armies in France, the Belgians cut those railways. That these lines were not cut before was a part of the Allies' strategy.

What in these circumstances were the measures taken by the invaders? The main measure was, as far as possible, to depopulate the country between their lines and the Bel-

gian defences. The measure had two objects—to prevent the Belgians receiving information of German movements, and more especially of the movement of reinforcements; and to embarrass the defence by driving into the seaboard districts crowds of homeless and starving refugees.

The measure, however, was carried out on such a scale as to suggest that yet another object was to prepare the way for a German immigration as a support of the contemplated conquest. The expropriation of native landowners on the frontier of Prussian Poland, and the granting of their lands to officers and non-commissioned officers of the German army reserves, is an example of the policy, accompanied in Prussian Poland by the prohibition of the native language in elementary schools.

European history affords happily few episodes equal to the depopulation of part of the valley of the Meuse, which was at this time entered upon. The towns of Dinant and Ardenne were totally destroyed, their male populations massacred, and the women and children carried off in defiance of every usage of civilised warfare. Indeed, to describe this devastation of Belgium as in any sense civilised warfare would be a travesty of the term. Its ferocity was possibly no

146 Hacking Through Belgium

more than a cloak to hide a calculated purpose.

In an official declaration issued from Berlin on August 27 it was stated that:—

The distribution of arms and ammunition among the civil population of Belgium had been carried out on systematic lines, and the authorities enraged the public against Germany by assiduously circulating false reports.

They were under the impression that with the aid of the French they would be able to drive the Germans out of Belgium in two days.

The only means of preventing surprise attacks from the civil population has been to interfere with unrelenting severity and to create examples which, by their frightfulness, would be a warning to the whole country.

On that declaration, one or two observations are necessary. Part of the defensive force of Belgium was its Civic Guard, having a total strength of some 400,000. So far from arming the civil population, the Belgian Government called in the arms of this force. It was decided that, situated as the country was, the best course was to confide its defence to its regular troops and reserves, and so remove all excuse for military severities.

The reports circulated by the Government

of Belgium, as anybody who refers back to them may ascertain, were carefully drawn up and substantially true.

The statement that the Belgians were under the impression alleged in this declaration, is, in face of the now known facts of the Allied plan of the campaign, ludicrous.

Still more remarkable, however, is the calm assumption that neither Belgium nor its Government had the smallest right to defend themselves, and that any attempt to exercise that right was, in effect, an act of rebellion against Germany. In fact, the presumption is that Belgium was already part of Germany; and this in face of the "solemn assurance" offered on August 9.

Last, but not least, has been the effort more recently made to suggest, despite this declaration, that the "unrelenting severity" and "examples of frightfulness" are hallucinations of Belgian excitement.*

* Several German medical men of eminence, among them Dr. Moll, were alleged to have offered this suggestion. On the other hand, Dr. Kaufman, of Aix-la-Chapelle, in a letter to the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, says that tales of German soldiers mutilated by Belgians—tales the circulation of which was officially countenanced—spread like wildfire among the soldiers, and a single case of a man being mutilated by a shell was magnified into an outrage, and this was only one of a hundred similar instances. The soldiers, by auto-suggestion, got to believe their own wild fancies, and by propagating their stories caused a most dangerous state of anger and exasperation in the German Army. At Huy, a

148 Hacking Through Belgium

These things speak for themselves. Nine towns in Belgium—Louvain, Aerschot, Tirlemont, Termonde, Jodoigne, Dinant, Ardenne, Visé, Charleroi, and Mons—had been reduced to ruins. Others, like Malines, Diest, and Alost, had been in great part wrecked. At Liége a whole quarter of the city had been surrounded, set on fire, and its terrified and unarmed inhabitants, as they fled from the burning houses, shot down wholesale by machine guns until the streets ran with blood.* Yet the world was solemnly assured that it was all no more than a bad dream.

So far from aiding, as intended, the military situation of the German forces, this policy of rapine tended to defeat itself. After the defeat of the German armies on the Marne, the Government of Berlin made a second offer of accommodation to the Belgian Ministry. The reply was a sortie in full force from the Belgian lines, which obliged

German non-commissioned officer and a private had been wounded by shots. On the assertion that the shots had been fired by inhabitants the German commander, Major von Baschutch, ordered a number of houses to be burned. The burgomaster, however, persuaded him to hold an inquiry. This proved that the shots had been fired by German soldiers in a drunken panic.

* Shortly before this atrocity, a proclamation had been issued at Liége ordering the citizens to raise their hats to German officers in the street, and to salute men of the rank and file. It was notified that if this command was not obeyed, the German soldiery were authorised to enforce "due respect."

the enemy to employ against them three army corps of reserves they were just then sending through northern Belgium into France. In France, those reinforcements were urgently needed. It is evident that this second offer of accommodation merely had as its primary object the prompt arrival of those troops. They had to be recalled from the French frontier, and to join with the forces of occupation in a fiercely fought four days' battle.

In putting upon the renewed offer the interpretation here alluded to, the Belgian Government were well aware that, apart altogether from its worthlessness as a pledge, the Germans, in the political object which had plainly from the first dictated their treatment of the population, had signally failed. The invaders had relied as their chief instrument on terror. The instrument had broken in their hands. Neither had they as yet gained one real military success. On the contrary, they had suffered either heavy reverses, or had fought at great cost actions yielding no substantial fruits. It was in vain that half the country had been laid waste. So long as the Belgian army, with a strongly fortified base, held the seaboard provinces, the situation of the invaders remained utterly secure.

150 Hacking Through Belgium

To understand the true position of the Belgian resistance, it is advisable to realise the character of the defences of Antwerp. When, after a prolonged discussion, General Brialmont was, fifty years ago, authorised to modernise the defences of Antwerp and Namur, and to re-fortify Liège, he adopted, in the case of Antwerp, the resources afforded by its situation as a seaport. The older ramparts were demolished, and replaced, at a distance allowing for natural expansion of the city within them, by a new inner ring of massive earthworks between forts, of the form known as a blunted redan. The plan adopted by Brialmont was on the system described by military engineers as the polygonal trace, and his work has always been looked upon as one of the best examples of that system, considered best adapted to meet the range and accuracy of modern siege artillery.

But undoubtedly the distinctive feature was presented by the wet ditches, 150 feet broad with some 20 feet depth of water, which surround not only the inner works, but also the line of detached forts built on an average two miles in advance of those works. Brialmont was the first military engineer to carry out this idea, now followed in all present-day fortification. Each of his forts, with a front of 700 yards, mounted 15 howitzers and

120 guns. There were thus on the 9 forts, including Merxem, 1,080 pieces of ordnance.

Since Brialmont's time, however, his outer forts had been connected by an enceinte, now 15 miles or thereabouts in length, strengthened by 18 redoubts, and the second wet ditch. As a third line of defence, there were, at the same time, built the 25 large forts and 13 redoubts, enclosing round the city an area of some 200 square miles. Between the first and second line of defences, the space formed an entrenched camp of, roughly, 17,000 acres in extent.

To protect the navigation of the Scheldt, and to prevent the city from being deprived of supplies, six of these great outer forts were placed at commanding points along the river. By cutting the dykes on the Rupel and the Scheldt areas could be flooded which would limit an attack to the south and south-east, and not only enable a defending army to concentrate its strength in that direction, but enable it behind the outer third line of fortifications to dispute in force the passage of the Nethe.

There were thus on the various defences some 4,000 pieces of ordnance, and, looking at the rivers and wet ditches to be negotiated, it was evident that an attempt to take the fortress by storm could only hope to succeed

152 Hacking Through Belgium

after a very heavy bombardment followed by an attack with overwhelmingly superior forces.

Since at Liége, as proved by the identification tallies collected from the German dead, the attempt to storm that place, a far easier enterprise, had cost the attackers 16,000 lives, it is no matter for surprise that they intended to postpone an attack upon Antwerp until their enterprise against France had proved successful.

So acute, however, was the annoyance they experienced from the Belgian army, and so manifest the political effects of its continued activity and being, that they resolved upon an attack with what was evidently an insufficient though, nevertheless, a large force. This force, more than twice as numerous as the Belgian army, succeeded in making its way round to the north of the fortress, where both the outer and the second line of defence were judged weakest. They had failed, however, to reckon upon the element of defence afforded by the dykes. These at Fort Oudendyk, and elsewhere along the Scheldt, the Belgians promptly cut, though not before they had allowed the besiegers to place their siege guns in position.

The result was that the Germans found themselves flooded out, and lost a consider-

able part of their artillery. Men struggling breast deep in water, or to save their guns, were shot down from the forts. Some climbed into trees; not a few were drowned. They were forced to beat a hasty and disastrous retreat, harassed by a sortie of the whole Belgian army.

Not until the failure of their great expedition into France had become manifest, with the prospective loss, in consequence, of the possession of Belgium, the real and primary object of the war, did they address themselves, with all the resources available, to the reduction of the great fortress. Evidently the hope of being able, with Antwerp in their power, to defy efforts to turn them out, inspired this enterprise. After a bombardment with their huge 42-centimetre guns lasting some ten days they succeeded in making a breach in the outer ring of forts, and at the end of five days of heavy fighting drove the Belgians across the Nethe. These successes, however, were dearly bought.

CHAPTER X

THE AGONY OF ANTWERP

IN this drama of a gallant nation's sorrows, a spectacle which, the world over, must endear the name of freedom afresh to every heroic heart, no act has appealed more strongly than the gallant defence of Antwerp and its lurid close.

Once the commercial capital of the world, adorned, to quote the words of Motley, "with some of the most splendid edifices in Christendom," Antwerp has the honour which no vicissitudes can dim of being one of the earliest seats in Europe of public spirit and liberty. Nor is it easy to accept the belief that such a city is destined to become merely the gateway of an ignoble Prussia.

As affairs stood at the beginning of October, the Germans were anxious to gain some decisive success. So far, the war had failed to yield any. They had met with heavy reverses. They were feeling sharply already the economic effects of the

virtual closing of the Rhine. In the belief that, Belgium subjugated, no combination of Powers would be able to tear it from their grasp, and urgent to complete that subjugation while time yet offered, they pushed the siege with all the energy they could command.

This hurry, as at Liége, proved prodigal. An attempt to storm fort Waelhem alone cost nearly 8,000 men killed and wounded. As the reduction of the outer fortifications threatened to be slow, the 11- and 12-inch mortars at first employed were reinforced by the new 16-inch mortars throwing shells more than 800 lbs. in weight. These ponderous engines, transported with immense labour into France, were, with equal labour, hauled back across Belgium, and on the foundations of demolished buildings, placed into position against the forts situated to the south of the Nethe. At the same time, in order to explode magazines and to fire buildings, shells were used filled with naphtha, designed to scatter a rain of blazing oil. The besiegers' loss of life in the attempt to storm Waelhem was avenged by destroying the city waterworks, situated close to that fort. This reduced the population of Antwerp to the supply afforded by such wells as were within the city limits and made it impossible to put out fires should they occur.

156 Hacking Through Belgium

By October 5, forts Waelhem, Wavre, Ste. Catherine, and Konighoyck had been overpowered, and the fort of Lierre silenced. All these forts lie south of the Nethe. The villages adjacent were burned to the ground. At Lierre, a mile to the rear of fort Lierre, a German shell crashed through the roof of the Belgian military hospital. Some of the wounded men lost their lives. On October 7, after a furious concentrated bombardment, fort Broechem was a heap of ruins.

The way was thus open for a final attempt, under the weight of the German guns, to win the passage of the Nethe. Against great odds the Belgians offered a stubborn resistance. The action was one of the most bloody in the Belgian campaign. In it King Albert was wounded, though happily not seriously. This was the second injury he had met with. All through the war he had taken an active part with his troops, encouraging them in the trenches, braving every risk.

At the instance of the Belgian Government, the British sent to Antwerp on October 3, under the command of General Paris, of the Royal Marine Artillery, two naval brigades and one brigade of marines, a total of 8,000 men, with heavy naval guns and quick-firing naval ordnance mounted on armoured trains.

The Belgian command devolved upon General de Guise, military governor of Antwerp, one of the youngest, but also one of the ablest of the generals of the Belgian army. On both sides, the passage of the Nethe was disputed with desperate determination. The German attack at this time was directed, not only against the Belgian position north of the Nethe, through Linth and Waerloos, but with particular energy against forts Lierre, Kessel, and Broechen. These forts still held out. They covered the left flank of the defence. The right flank, protected by the flooded area along the Rupel, was unassailable.

Regardless of losses, the Germans worked day and night to float into position and complete the parts of seven pontoon bridges they had put together on the reaches of the river beyond the range of the forts. It was evident that if they could turn the left of the Belgian defence by destroying fort Broechen, and so breaching the outer defences at that point, just to the north of the Nethe, they could, having crossed in force farther up the stream, launch a formidable flank attack, which must compel the whole Belgian and British force to withdraw.

It was on the Belgian left, however, that the British naval brigades and marines had

158 Hacking Through Belgium

been posted. With the support of the naval guns, forts Lierre, Kessel, and Broechem defied all the efforts to reduce them. Very soon the fact became evident that this plan of turning the defence was impracticable. Hidden in bomb-proof entrenchments, the British suffered comparatively few losses, despite what seemed an appalling rain of shells. On the other hand, the naval guns, commanding the course of the river over a reach of ten miles, speedily made havoc of every attempt to cross.

In these circumstances, the Germans changed their tactics. They resolved upon a frontal attack through Duffel. Against the Belgian lines, a furious bombardment was concentrated. Under cover of this, and notwithstanding that, for a mile beyond the banks of the river, the country had been flooded, they advanced in masses to rush the passage. Simultaneously, and to prevent this attack being enfiladed by the naval guns, they made a feint of attempting to force their way over at Lierre.

Their losses were immense. Repeatedly their shattered columns were thrown back. For two days, at appalling sacrifice, they fought for the passage. On the British position the attack made no impression. But at daybreak on October 6, following an assault

delivered in overwhelming force, the enemy succeeded at length in gaining a foothold on the north bank near Duffel, and in holding it despite all the efforts of the Belgians to dislodge them.

The Belgian army was obliged to fall back, and with them the British contingent, but it is evidence enough of the character and vigour of the resistance that, heavily outnumbered though they were, the Belgians, in retiring upon the inner defences of the fortress, left the Germans unable immediately to follow up their advantage. The British force withdrew without the loss of any of its guns. Indeed, the naval guns and the armoured trains covered the retirement so effectually that it was impossible for the Germans, until they had transferred their heavy artillery to the north of the Nethe, to press the retreating forces.

Beyond the boom of the hostile guns away to the south, and the nearer crash of the fortress artillery in reply, those within the city had, during these days of stress, little idea of how affairs were really going. A picture of the scene on the night of Tuesday, October 6, is given by the special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* :—

The night was so impelling in its exquisite

beauty that I found it impossible to sleep, or even to stay indoors.

On the other side of the river the trees were silhouetted in the water, the slight haze giving a delicious mezzotint effect to a scene worthy of Venice. As I walked along the stone-paved landing piers the contrast between the beauty of the picture and the grim prospect of what the death-dealing machinery all along my path might make it at any moment was appealingly vivid.

Within a few hours, however, the scene changed with what to most in the city seemed almost startling suddenness. Following a proclamation by the authorities warning all who could to leave Antwerp as soon as possible, began an exodus the like of which has not been witnessed since the days of "the Spanish Fury." The same eye-witness proceeds:—

All day the streets have been clogged and jammed with panicky fugitives fleeing from a city which, in their terrified imagination, is foredoomed. Every avenue of approach to the pontoon bridge across the Scheldt leading to St. Nicolaes has been rendered impassable by a heterogeneous mass of vehicles of every size and kind, from the millionaire's motor-car to ramshackle gigs loaded up with the Lares and Penates of the unfortunate fugitives.

Half a mile or so further on moored alongside each other were two of the Great Eastern Railway steamboats, which ply between Antwerp and Harwich, or, as at present, Tilbury. In view of the very great pressure of passengers, both were to be despatched. I walked through them. Each was filled to its utmost capacity with refugees who might have been sardines, so closely were they packed. In every chair round the saloon tables was a man or a woman asleep. Others were lying on the floors, on the deck, in chairs, or as they best could to seek a respite from their fatigues, a few, realising that theirs would be but a very short night—the boats were to sail at dawn so as to have as much daylight as possible with which to navigate safely the dangers of the mine-fields—preferred to walk about on the jetty discussing the while their hard fate.

The St. Antoine, the leading hotel of Antwerp, has for some weeks past been the temporary home of the various Foreign Ministers, but with their departure to-day has closed its doors. Last night it was the scene of an affecting leave-taking by the Queen of the *personnel* of the British and Russian Legations, her Majesty being visibly moved. I am informed that the King sent to the German commander yesterday by the hands of a neutral *attaché* a plan of Antwerp with the sites of the Cathedral and other ancient monuments marked upon it, which he begged might be spared destruction.

162 Hacking Through Belgium

In the meantime, the besiegers had made an attempt to carry the inner defences by storm. It was disastrous. Describing it, Mr. Granville Fortescue says:—

In their advance to the inner line of forts the Germans literally filled the dykes with their own dead. Coming on in close formation, they were cut down by the machine guns as wheat before the scythe.

Realising that it was, to all intents, impossible to carry the inner defences by storm, and that the garrison must be forced to surrender by the destruction of the place, the Germans, who had by this brought their great guns within range of the city, opened from their new positions along the north side of the Nethe a bombardment which, for sustained fury, has rarely been equalled.

The bombardment began at midnight on October 7. From that time shells rained upon the place. The havoc, heightened by bombs thrown down from Zeppelins, speedily, and especially in the southern quarter, caused destructive fires. Viewed from afar—the fire was seen from the frontier of Holland—this great and beautiful seat of commerce, industry, and art, one of the glories of Europe, looked during those terrible hours like the crater of a volcano in

164 Hacking Through Belgium

eruption, with a shower of shooting stars falling into it. Silhouetted against the glare, its towers stood luminous amid the fiery light. Highest of all the incomparable spire of its cathedral pointed, as though a warning finger, into the dark sky.

For some time before midnight, the roar of the cannonade had ceased. The enemy's guns had for a spell become silent. To the deep bay of the cannon on the defences there came no answering defiance. At last even the guns on the defences had suspended speech. Mr. B. J. Hudson, of the *Central News*, one of the last English correspondents to leave, says:—

There was, uncannily enough, a grim calm before the midnight hour and the darkened city was like a town of the dead. The footsteps of a belated wayfarer echoed loudly.

Then suddenly came the first shell, which brought numbers of women into the streets, their anxious object being to discover whether the bombardment had really begun. Very closely did the roar of the guns and the explosion and crash of the striking shells follow each other. All over the southern section of the city shells struck mansion, villa, and cottage indiscriminately. Then the fortress guns, the field batteries, and the armoured trains opened out in one loud chorus, and the din became terrific, while the

reflection in the heavens was seemingly one huge, tossing flame.

From the roof of my hotel the spectacle was an amazing one. The nerve-racking screech of the shells—the roof-tops of the city alternately dimmed, then illuminated by some sudden red light which left the darkness blacker than before—and then the tearing out of roof or wall by the explosion, made a picture which fell in no way short of Inferno. The assurance thus given to the population that the Germans were fulfilling their threat to bombard a helpless people, sent the citizens to their cellars, as they had been advised to go by the local papers of the day before.

About nine o'clock in the morning the German fire once more became heavier, but the screaming of the projectiles and the thunder of falling masonry left the fugitive population quite unmoved.

I noticed in one case a family of father, mother, and three small children who absolutely ignored the explosion of a shell some sixty yards in their rear, moving stolidly on.

About ten o'clock one of the petrol storage tanks in the city was hit and fired, and one by one the others shared its fate.

All along the River Scheldt quay barges and small steamers were taking on human freight as rapidly as they could, charging the wretched people 20 francs a head for the brief trip into Dutch territory.

As soon as the flowing spirit from the

166 Hacking Through Belgium

petrol tanks began to come down the stream something like a panic at last broke out. Those on board the steamers yelled to the officers, pointing to the danger and crying, "Enough! Enough!" Those on the quay, unwilling to be left behind, made wild rushes to obtain a place on the boats.

I saw one woman drowned in one of these rushes, while her husband—rather more lucky—fell on the deck of a boat and escaped with an injured skull. Women handed down babies, young children, perambulators, and all manner of packages, and then themselves scrambled on to the decks, using any precarious foothold available. It was a wonder that many were not drowned or otherwise killed.

Eventually the captains of the river craft, having gained as many fares as could safely be taken, sheered off, leaving many thousands still on the quay-side.

Still the shells were falling all over the town. The smoke from the blazing petroleum and the burning houses rose in great columns and must have formed an appalling sight for the people as far north as the Dutch town of Roosendaal.

What the position is outside the city walls we do not know. We hear our guns crashing out loud defiance to the enemy in a persistent roar; we hear the enemy's reply almost as distinctly. . . .

All that night and next day the stream of

fugitives poured out—westward towards Ostend, northward towards Holland. Of the scene at Flushing, Mr. Fortescue wrote :—

Hordes of refugees fill this town. Some come by train from Roosendaal, others have escaped from the city by boat. All sorts of river craft come ploughing through the muddy waters of the Scheldt, crowded to the gunwales with their human freight. Tugs tow long lines of grain-lighters filled with women, children, and old men.

Their panic is pitiful. Since the first shell shrieked over the city a frightened, struggling mob has been pressing onward to escape the hail of fire and iron. Imagine the queue that shuffles forward at a championship football game increased a hundred-fold in length and breadth, and you will see the crowd moving to the railway station. Another throng fought their way to the quays. All the time German shells sang dismally overhead; for the most part they fell into the southern section of the city.

From the refugees I hear the same pitiful tales I have heard so often. A mother with two girls, one four and the other three, was torn from the arm of her husband and pushed on a departing boat. All through the panic of flight it has been "women and children first." Those who are here bear witness to the bravery of those who defend the city.

168 Hacking Through Belgium

But if the besiegers had imagined that they were about to reap any solid military advantage, a disappointment was being prepared for them. For six days they had striven to cross the Scheldt at Termonde, and striven without success. The objective was to invest Antwerp from both sides of the Scheldt, and thus either for the remainder of the campaign to imprison the Belgian army, or to destroy it, amid the ruins of Antwerp, by their shell fire. That would have been a military success of an important character. Not only would it have left Belgium for the time being at their mercy, but it must undoubtedly have a moral effect not to be ignored.

On October 8, however, the invaders had gained a passage over the Scheldt at Termonde, and had compelled the Belgian force opposing them, much inferior in point of numbers, to fall back upon Lokeren. That place is on the line of communication between Antwerp and Ostend. In view of this danger, the evacuation of Antwerp became a necessity. The danger had been foreseen. The Belgian authorities indeed had already arrived at their decision. It is now known that this had been reached on October 3, and that the object of the small British reinforcement was to enable the

evacuation to be accomplished. That object they fulfilled. By the timely warning given to the population, nearly 150,000 had already been enabled to escape. All the available shipping in the port was used for transport purposes. The rest, including some 36 captured German merchant steamers, which could not be removed owing to the neutrality of Holland, was blown up and sunk in the docks. Objects of value were removed, and such stores as could not, and were likely to be of value to the enemy, were destroyed. The Belgian Government, on October 7, transferred itself to Ostend.

The Belgian army followed. By the morning of Friday, October 9, the evacuation had been completed. All the guns on the abandoned defences were spiked. Under the command of General de Guise, however, the forts controlling the approaches on the Scheldt continued to hold out.

In the meantime, the Germans had been pressing their attack upon Lokeren. The main portion of the Belgian army and 2nd British Naval Brigade, as well as the Marines, retired upon Ostend while the communications remained open. The first division of the Belgian army, which had been the last to leave Antwerp, and had been en-

gaged in rendering the place useless to the besiegers, retreated fighting with the Germans north of the Scheldt a succession of rear-guard actions.

In the face of impossible odds, the 1st British Naval Brigade, now without the support of their heavy guns, were forced, fighting tenaciously, across the Dutch frontier at Huist. A division of the Belgian army were also compelled to cross the boundary into Holland.

Just after noon on October 9, the besiegers entered Antwerp by a breach they had made near fort No. 3 on the south-east side of the inner line of works. By then, the burning and ruined city presented the appearance of a tomb. What remnant of the population remained were in hiding in their cellars. Every person of authority had fled. Amid this scene of wreck and desolation, the Germans made their entry and installed their "government." But the Belgian army had once more eluded their grasp, and with the navigation of the Scheldt closed, the possession of Antwerp, gained at the sacrifice of so much blood had become a possession presenting no compensating military advantages.

At the time these lines were written, the record, as already said, remains incom-

plete. Enough, however, has been outlined in this brief sketch to prove that the struggle and the sufferings of Belgium form one of the bravest efforts ever made for a people's freedom, and a protest against the policy of rapine that can never fade from the memory of civilised nations, nor fail to command their admiration and their respect.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHIEF EVENTS

July 31.—Germany declares war against Russia and sends 12 hours' ultimatum to France. Belgian Government orders partial mobilisation.

August 1.—Germany formally announces mobilisation. France orders mobilisation.

August 2.—German troops invade Luxemburg. German ultimatum presented at Brussels, giving 12 hours for reply.

August 3.—Belgian Government refuse demand for German occupation of Belgium and "assisted passage" to German troops. German armies cross Belgian frontier.

August 4.—Combat opens at Visé and Argenteau for the passage of the Meuse. Bombardment of Liége begun.

August 5.—Special meeting of Belgian Parliament. Ministry of all parties formed. Emergency measures voted.

First attempt of Germans to storm Liége defeated.

Chronology of Chief Events 173

August 6.—Germans win passage of the Meuse. Second attempt to storm Liége. King of the Belgians leaves Brussels for the front.

August 7.—Third attempt to storm Liége. General von Emmich asks for 24 hours' armistice. It is refused.

August 8.—Belgian troops evacuate trenches at Liége; 16,000 identification tallies collected from German dead.

August 9.—Germany offers accommodation with Belgium. Offer rejected. Railways and roads cut.

August 10.—German troops enter Liége. Forts still hold out. Leading citizens of Liége seized as hostages. "Fine" of £2,000,000 imposed on city and province of Liége.

German cavalry advance to Tongres and Ramillies. Attack upon Huy. French troops arrive in Belgium.

August 11.—German flying columns advance upon Diest and Eghezée. Country laid waste.

August 12.—Battle at Diest and Haelen. Combat of Eghezée. Germans repulsed, but capture Huy.

August 13.—Retreat of Germans from Diest. Pursuit by Belgians and French through St. Trond to Warene.

174 Hacking Through Belgium

August 14.—German expedition against Tirlemont defeated. French occupy Dinant.

August 15.—First attack upon Dinant.

August 16.—Second attack and battle of Dinant.

August 17.—Belgian Government removes from Brussels to Antwerp. British Expeditionary Force lands at Boulogne.

August 18.—General German advance across Belgium begins. Outpost fighting round Tirlemont and Gembloux.

August 19.—First day of battle of Louvain. Last of Liége forts destroyed.

August 20.—Second day of battle of Louvain. Germans occupy Malines.

August 21.—German entry into Brussels. "Fine" of £8,000,000 demanded.

August 22.—Germans advance upon Charleroi. Attack upon the passages of the Sambre.

August 23.—Battle of Mons and Charleroi. Fall of Namur. Belgians recapture Malines. Germans set up a new civil and military government for Belgium.

August 24.—Battle of Mons and Charleroi continued. Retirement of British and French forces. Germans occupy Ghent.

August 25.—Sack and destruction of Louvain.

Chronology of Chief Events 175

- August 26.*—Destruction of Termonde and Dinant.
- August 27.*—British occupy Ostend. Germans driven out of Ghent. Bombardment of Malines.
- August 28.*—Sack and destruction of Aerschot. Belgian Government appoints Commission to inquire into atrocities.
- August 29.*—Efforts of German civil and military authorities at Brussels to collect the "fine." Resistance of Burgomaster and City Council.
- August 30—September 6.*—Belgian operations against German lines.
- September 9.*—Germany's second offer of an accommodation rejected. Belgian sortie in force from Antwerp.
- September 10-11.*—Heavy fighting. Belgians again recapture Malines and Termonde, and occupy Alost
- September 12.*—German reinforcements recalled from French frontier.
- September 13.*—Belgians retire upon Antwerp.
- September 15.*—First German attack upon Antwerp. Belgians cut the dykes. Heavy loss of German guns. Invaders defeated in successful sortie.
- September 25.*—Opening of second attack upon Antwerp.

176 Hacking Through Belgium

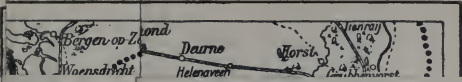
October 1-4.—Five days' battle along the Dyle.

October 3.—Antwerp garrison reinforced by British Naval Brigade and Marines.

October 4-6.—Battle on the Nethe. Germans cross the river.

October 7.—Belgian Government transferred to Ostend. Bombardment of city of Antwerp begun.

October 9.—Belgian army evacuates Antwerp. Germans enter the city.





HMod.

D179

135986-

Author Dane, Edmund

Title Hacking through Belgium.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LIBRARY

Do not
remove
the card
from this
Pocket.

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File."
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU

