Gwendoline Edwards.

THE RETREAT FROM MONS

BY ONE WHO SHARED IN IT

GENERAL SIR H. SMITH-DORRIEN.

From the Painting by Arnold Mountford.

The Retreat from Mons

BY ONE WHO SHARED IN IT

BY

A. CORBETT-SMITH

(*Major, R.F.A.*)

With Three Plates and Map

For who is he, whose chin is but enrich'd
With one appearing hair, that will not follow
These cull'd and choice-drawn cavaliers to France?

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To

GENERAL SIR H. L. SMITH-DORRIEN,
G.C.M.G., G.C.B., D.S.O., Etc.

Dear General Smith-Dorrien,

When, some few months ago, you honoured me by your acceptance of this dedication I had in mind to make a single volume which should trace the course of the War during the period of your command of the Second Army, the unforgettable days from Mons to Ypres.

Since then, I have found that there is one phase of the operations which has gripped the imagination of the public more than any other event of the past two years: the "Retreat from Mons." It is, indeed, almost incredible how little the people know of this, and how splendidly they respond to the telling of the story.

But it seems to me that the story can never be told as it should be. Only those who actually experienced the horror and the splendour of those ten days could hope to tell it, and for them the facts are blurred and distorted by the nightmare through which they passed.

Dedication

Still, I am rashly making the attempt, and in doing so I try to write of the big, human side of things. For it is the trivial, homely incidents in the daily life of the British soldier, and the stories of noble devotion and chivalry of gallant gentlemen like Francis Grenfell and Bradbury, which fire the imagination. I know that you will understand and appreciate my motives.

For the rest, should the public be kind to this trivial volume I shall hope later to continue the narrative as I had originally intended.

Will you, then, accept my book, not in tribute of a Command which must remain indelibly scored in letters of gold on the page of our country's history so long as Britain endures, but as a memory of the two or three years of peace when I was privileged to work with you and of the year of war when I had the honour of serving, one of that "band of brothers," in your Command?

I am,

Very faithfully yours,

A. Corbett-Smith.

The Middle Temple,
London.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I TENDER my very grateful thanks to GENERAL SIR HORACE SMITH-DORRIEN for his kindness in reading the proof-sheets of the book and for several most valuable items of information.

My thanks are also due to CAPTAIN C. T. ATKINSON, of the Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence, for his courteous help in the task of compiling the Roll of Honour. Also to the SECRETARY, R.A. Institution, for the loan of material for the same purpose.

I have availed myself to some extent of the researches of MR. HILAIRE BELLOC in my estimates in Chapter V.; while my details of the German Army are taken from German sources, "Deutsche Land- und Seemacht," by Rabenau, and other volumes.

To my comrades-in-arms (few, alas! remain), whose deeds and experiences have contributed to the writing of the story, I hold out a hand of greeting. I salute in reverence the immortal souls of the gallant dead.

A. C.-S.

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The Retreat from Mons

CHAPTER I

MOBILISATION

Now all the youth of England are on fire,
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies;
Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought
Reigns solely in the breast of every man.

August 5th, 1914! "Who would have dreamed of such a thing!" exclaimed the big majority. "So it has come at last," said the small minority.

Broadly speaking, there you have the country's opinion during those now dimly remembered days which followed immediately upon Germany's throwing down of the gauntlet.

Officers and men of our once-upon-a-time professional Army did not bother very much about it either way. War was their job. Active service was to be welcomed as a picnic change from the monotony of soldiering in

England. Also, to the man keen on his profession (and since the Boer War such men have been steadily increasing in numbers) it meant the chance of promotion and of showing what he was made of.

A war, even long foreseen, must inevitably come as a surprise when it does actually break out, and this one was no exception. During the last week of that July there were very, very few in Aldershot who felt certain that the hour was at last striking.

But Aldershot was ready for it. For many a long year past Aldershot had existed for the Army. Latterly it had been the forge where Britain's little striking force, the spear-head of her armies, had been welded, sharpened and tested, made ready for instant launching. So, with the Fleet, were we prepared to fulfil our pact with France; or, if the summons came, to stand by Belgium.

Aldershot existed for war, and the comings and goings of troops passed almost unnoticed. True, it now became increasingly difficult to find rooms in the town, and the local outfitters promptly set to work to reap a golden harvest from the fantastic prices which they put upon war gear of all kinds, but that was all—at least to the eye of a casual observer.

Mobilisation

There was Fritz, the doyen of Aldershot hairdressers. I wonder how much he learned in those days of the movements of units. Fritz had been an institution in the camps when present-day G.O.C.'s, grizzled and weather-beaten, had, as junior subalterns, sought his advice upon the training of incipient moustaches. Fritz remembered them all, could instantly reel off details of their careers, their regiments or stations, from the time they had left Aldershot until they had returned in senior commands. All duly pigeonholed in Berlin together with seemingly trivial incidents in their private lives.

Later on, sometime at the Aisne, rumour came round that Herr Fritz had been up to mischief of a more serious nature and that he had been duly lodged in prison, or shot, or something equally suitable.

Those were happy if very strenuous days at Aldershot that week or so before the embarkation. Men talked very little about the future, everyone was really too busy. Thoughts naturally flew back to the South African War when they did talk.

"Nobody was particularly keen on that," was the generally expressed opinion; "nobody wanted to kill the Boers; too one-sided. This

—oh! this is the real thing. We've got our work cut out."

The very day after the mobilisation the Officers' Mess showed signs of packing up. It reminded one so much of the third act in *The Second in Command.* Two notices in the hall brought things home :—

"Officers may wear Service dress or blue undress jackets in Mess."

"Officers are particularly requested to pay their mess bills before leaving."

Packing-cases and parcels began to drift in and lie about: dozens of telegrams passed in and out: a smaller variety of dishes appeared at luncheon and dinner: the regimental band came and played to us every night (the cheerier spirits all took a hand at conducting, especially rag-time).

Everybody had his job, and nobody knew what anyone else was doing. Right at the beginning we experienced a curious feeling of secrecy. You would see an officer at lunch and miss him at dinner.

"Oh yes! I believe he has gone this afternoon," someone remarks.

"When are you off?" Colonel X. would say to an officer in a moment of forgetfulness, hastily adding, "No, I don't want to know—

but, mind you pay your mess bill before you go."

This secrecy of movement was certainly the most striking feature of those early days: that, and the splendid organisation. We have got accustomed to it since, but at the time, and to men used to the happy-go-lucky methods of this dear, lovable, muddle-headed old country of ours, that organisation struck one as amazing.

On August 5th every C.O. was handed a file of documents. In these were given the most precise directions as to times, places and dates when his unit was to leave Aldershot. For instance:

"Train No. 463Y will arrive at siding B at 12.35 A.M., August 10th.

"You will complete loading by 3.40 A.M.

"This train will leave siding C at 9.45 A.M., August 10th.

"You will march on to the platform at 9.30 A.M. and complete your entraining by 9.40."

And I believe it is a fact that every train left five minutes ahead of its scheduled time. The London and South Western Railway was given sixty hours in which to send to Southampton 350 troop-trains. They did it in forty-

five hours. "Some" hustle! The astonishing efficiency of it all, and the admirable co-operation between military and civil authorities.

I very much doubt if there were more than two officers of the Staff at Aldershot H.Q. who knew details of the intended movements. Fritz must have been annoyed. C.O.'s, and other individual officers, who knew when their own unit was timed for departure, entered splendidly into the spirit of the game and loyally kept the information to themselves; would not even tell their people, nor their best girls.

One day the King came down. The visit was as secret as everything else. Each unit received about a quarter of an hour's warning of His Majesty's approach, and the men turned out of their tents or broke off their work to line up by the road. A few words of "good-bye, and good luck" to the men, a warm hand-clasp to the officers, three cheers, and the Royal car slipped forward to the next unit. One could hear the ripple of cheering flow round the camps as His Majesty passed.

By the way, it is a little curious how, from the very beginning, there have been just three words used by everyone in bidding "good-bye." "Good-bye, and good luck." A kind of spontaneous, universal formula. Officers

used it, the men, mothers, wives and sweethearts.

"Good-bye, and good luck" to our sailors
(It's a big debt we owe you to-day),
"Good-bye, and good luck" to our soldiers
(Some day we shall hope to repay).
Though anxious the hearts left behind you,
And a tear from the eye seems to fall,
Yet—"good-bye"—God be with you, "good luck" attend you,
"Good-bye, and good luck to you all"—

as the refrain of a popular song had it later.

Impressions of those few hurried days are blurred. In a sense one had been through it all many times before. It differed but little from moving station or preparing for manœuvres. And yet there was something of the glamour of an unknown future before one: an instinctive feeling that this was the end of soldiering as we had known it. Not that anyone dreamed of the war lasting beyond Christmas; there are no pessimists in the Army. We were all at school breaking up for the holidays, and I think that just about sums up the situation as we saw it at Aldershot. The unknown future was more on the lines of "Shall we get any skating?" "Will there be some good shows at the theatres?" "What sort of fun

will the Pytchley give us?" "Shall I be able to get in the Hunt Ball?"

And so one has little enough to say about the days of mobilisation and packing up. Besides, quite enough has already been written to satisfy an interested public. One little adventure, however, seems worth recording. It befell a certain Gunner captain who was detailed to conduct a draft of men from one unit to another. The yarn has the merit of being true in every particular. It may form a small chapter to itself.

A TOURING COMPANY

"Putting two and two together," said the A.S.C. major, "I imagine that you're to take this draft on to Portsmouth and hand over to the O.C. of the company down there."

Why a Gunner captain should have to conduct a draft of Field Gunners to a place like Portsmouth and hand them over to the tender mercies of an A.S.C. Company Commander, I couldn't imagine. Nor indeed why a Gunner should take his instructions from an A.S.C. major at all. But the Divisional C.R.A. had sent me up to him with the remark, "It looks as though you ought to report there," and that was all about it.

Mobilisation

Mobilisation is responsible for a good many queer happenings, and here at Aldershot on the third day of it most men were rather at sea.

Even in those few hours one had learned not to ask questions. There was no objection to the asking, but the answer was usually a vacant, far-away look over the shoulder and "Eenteenth Brigade Office? Oh, it's over there"; and a wave of the arm would comprehensively include Farnborough, Deepcut and the Town Station.

And that was how the trouble began. If only the A.S.C. major had exercised a little imagination and made five out of his addition sum: if only he had read his own instructions a little more carefully (although we didn't know that till afterwards), a draft of tired Gunners would not have spent the next week trailing about the South of England looking for an A.S.C. company which didn't want them, and their officer would not have received a black mark which nearly damned his future chances at the very outset. But that by the way.

"The men had their breakfast at three this morning," and the cheery little subaltern, who had brought the draft down from Newcastle, saluted and discreetly made himself still

smaller by vanishing hastily round the nearest corner.

I took my railway warrant and went out to have a look at the draft.

A fresh-looking lot they were; young, most of them, averaging about twenty-three years old; special reservists the senior sergeant told me. The few old hands, who sadly needed a shave and a wash, showed how young the rest of them were. I didn't take much stock of them, then. One doesn't when it's just a conducting job of a few hours, handing over, and back to Headquarters right away.

The men stood to attention, picked up their kits, and, with a "Fours left," we were off to the station down the shimmering, dancing, sandy roads of the Aldershot camps. The A.S.C. major returned to his ledgers and more arithmetic, and the cheery subaltern reclined at lordly ease in a Gunner Mess arm-chair, with a tinkling glass of gin and ginger beer at his elbow, and discussed the striking results of the previous day's battle in the North Sea —which had not taken place.

The station-master, who didn't look as worried as he felt, touched his cap.

"A local to ——, then change and go on to Reigate" (was it Reigate? I forget now,

one visited so many out-of-the-way places), "and from there you'll probably get a through train to Portsmouth. If there isn't room in the train you can always turn people out."

Visions of burly, homespun-clad farmers and comfortable market-women being turned out, protesting, by a mere Gunner captain danced through my brain. Actions for assault and battery, damages, bail, prison.

"How an if they will not turn out?" said I.

And then I realised. This was War, red War; and Great Britain was mobilising. The needs of the State were paramount.

"You shall bid them turn out in the Prince's name," and, unlike Dogberry, shall see that you are obeyed.

And I made myself two inches taller because after all a Gunner captain was somebody in the world now. And people looked with a new interest at the lads in khaki and began to realise, perhaps for the first time, that they would have to count on the British Army even though it were "such a little one."

To do the good folk justice there was never a word of protest at the idea of having to turn out. And we had to invite them to do so a

good many times before the company finished its tour of the Southern ports. Really it might have been a railway in Germany from the way the civilians gave road to the uniform. This change of attitude was certainly a vivid contrast to the days—last week was it?—when a man in His Majesty's uniform was looked at askance in crowded street and bar.

At Reigate, where we had to wait an hour, a bombardier, one of the old hands, begged leave to visit a certain hotel outside the station to buy some bread and cheese.

He was a man who hardly gave the appearance of being bread-and-cheese hungry, if you quite take my meaning, and the glassy stare with which this ancient tried to fix me augured ill for discipline if there were many others in the draft like him. Permission was refused. It was a trivial point gained but it had its consequences.

Portsmouth was reached in some five hours; and twenty minutes' march brought us to the A.S.C. barracks where a hot dinner would cheer us all; for I had remembered to send a telegram *en route* to tell them to expect us.

We were received with cordiality by a decrepit old store-keeper, and the stables' cat.

Otherwise the barracks looked as though an army had lately sacked the place from floor to basement.

The men looked glum, and there was more than a hint of a move to a near-by hotel for "bread and cheese." Well, they were only young reservists and discipline was an almost unknown quantity.

But dinner had to materialise somehow. So, demanding the keys of the castle from the unwilling seneschal, the senior sergeant, the bombardier, the stables' cat and myself started on a tour of inspection.

Good! The kitchen contained a sack of flour and most of a sheep. Apparently the sheep was intended to last the decrepit servitor and his struggling family for the rest of the week. But we paid no heed to tearful entreaties and ruthlessly tore the meat away from their very mouths.

"This is War," said I.

Soon dinner was well on the way, blankets were found for the men, and off I went to report to Headquarters.

H.Q. "received me most politely," as Harry Fragson used to sing, and didn't think they wanted me nor my company for any performance in Portsmouth.

"Come back to-morrow morning," said H.Q., "and we'll tell you."

The next day. "Oh, yes!" said H.Q., "you're Field Gunners, you're evidently sent here for Hilsea (two miles out): you'd better move on at once."

"Parade with kits in half an hour," I ordered.

Merrily we marched forth from the castle gates. Were we not wanted at Hilsea?

A cyclist orderly threw himself, panting, from his machine.

"H.Q.'s compliments and will you please report there at once."

"Halt! Fours about! Quick march!"

H.Q. again received me most politely.

"No, you're not to go to Hilsea. You've evidently got to join the Eenty-eenth A.S.C. Company which has gone on to Bristol. You'll just catch the 5.0 train if you're sharp."

"We're to go to Bristol," said I to the senior sergeant, "and you've got to get a move on or we'll miss the train."

"I've heard tell of Bristol," he ruminated; "nice place, so my wife's cousin's husband used to say. He did tell as how——"

But I cut the soliloquy short and got the draft out of the castle again.

A few minutes later peaceable citizens fled into doorways and up courts, electric cars pulled up short with a grinding of brakes, policemen held up traffic. The R.F.A. draft approached at a steady double.

"Where's the fire?" yelled some.

"The Germans have captured the 'Hampshire Arms,'" said others.

"It's for a cinema show," screamed a ragged urchin. Everyone gave us kindly encouragement, and girls waved merrily as we flew past. The bombardier, who was on the pavement side, threw an arm gallantly round the waist of a stout matron of some forty summers and dragged her, not unwillingly, half a dozen yards before he could get home with a kiss on the cheek.

But we caught that train with five minutes to spare. The men were now beginning to see the joke. As yet it had escaped me. Of course it was not the first time I had seen "Tommy" at his cheeriest under misadventures; but this cheeriness now struck me vividly for the first time. To-day it is world-famous.

They certainly made that journey a lively one. Six hours in a slow train across country —it is apt to become somewhat tedious. I tried to look like the man who owns a dog

which persists in nibbling the trousers of total strangers—to pretend they (the men, not the trousers) didn't belong to me. It was no good. They might have been Lancashire lads off to Blackpool for the "wakes."

So with imitations of Harry Tate, George Robey and other well-known favourites of the music-halls, the railway officials at the various stations being made the butt of the jokes; with a weird medley of harmony and melody, from "Hallo, hallo, who's your lady friend?" to "Sun of my Soul," the journey passed happily enough until the first of the Bristol stations was reached about 11.45 P.M.

As no one knew where the A.S.C. barracks were I got through on the telephone to H.Q.

"This is Captain Estcourt, R.F.A., speaking. I've got——"

The orderly evidently went to fetch someone else. It turned out to be an adjutant, who listened to me most politely.

"No, we've got no A.S.C. here. I don't think there are any in Bristol. But you might ring up —— Barracks and see." Prrr.

"Hallo! Is that —— Barracks? I'm Captain——"

The orderly went to fetch someone. This

time, after a long wait, it was evidently an irascible senior officer.

"No. No A.S.C. here. Try Avonmouth." Prrr.

This looked like bedding down in the station waiting-rooms. Still we would try Avonmouth.

Avonmouth Headquarters received me over the telephone most politely, considering the time of night.

"No, we've got no A.S.C. here; but you might ring up the Embarkation Office." Prrr.

"Hallo! Embarkation Office? I'm ——, etc."

The Embarkation Office was not quite so polite in its reception. It sounded very worried.

"No. We've got no A.S.C. here. You can come along down if you like in case the company should turn up."

Luckily the last train had not gone. When it drew up in the station the men greeted it as a long-lost friend. To the strains of "All aboard for Dixie" they clambered in, more cheery than ever.

At Avonmouth we came out into a wilderness of mighty sheds. The night breeze from the Bristol Channel carried with it the pungent, cleanly smell of tarred rope.

"This is Avonmouth," said I to the senior

sergeant, "and we can't go any farther unless a ship is waiting for us. I'm going to see where we can bed down."

The Embarkation Office had had time to recover from its worries and received me very politely.

Eventually we got the men into one of the sheds where hundreds of sacks of oats lay about. In ten minutes they had made themselves amazingly comfortable and peace reigned.

But I'm glad we went to Avonmouth. It gave me my first real glimpse of the astonishing organisation under which the Expeditionary Force was to take the field; and also of the methods of supply.

Outside the dock gates, by all the approach roads into the little town, there were streaming in hundreds upon hundreds of great motor lorries, the majority of them built to carry three tons.

From all parts of England and Scotland dozens were arriving every hour. The organisation of it! Here was the third or fourth day from mobilisation and there were a couple of thousand ready for transportation.

You picture a vividly green lorry of a big whisky distillery up North axle to axle with

the scarlet of a Brixton firm with its blatant advertisement of somebody's corsets. The cockney driver from a London furnishing house exchanged honeyed words with a colleague from "'twixt Trent and Tweed" in a polite inquiry as to why the hell he couldn't let his tail-board down without using his (the Londoner's) radiator to scrape his boots on.

"Can't you imagine Tommy's comments when he finds a 'Johnny Walker' van bringing up his ammunition in the wilds of Belgium," was the general remark, "but I suppose they'll give them a coat of paint first."

They didn't, as a matter of fact; at least not for several months, so that Tommy was able to indulge his gift of language to the full.

And so nearly two days passed. The men amused themselves by wandering about the docks, wondering at the shipping, and making sarcastic remarks about the lorry drivers who were being taught how to handle a rifle.

Then came a telegram from H.Q., Aldershot.

"Return and report here immediately."

"Good," said the senior sergeant to me, "I always did like Aldershot. But we've had quite a pleasant holiday seeing the country."

The draft duly paraded again, and when they learned their next destination their remarks were a joy to listen to.

We caught a 9.0 train in the evening into Bristol. Then we marched across the city, a matter of, say, three miles. It was a Sunday night, the good citizens were abed. But my lads were determined to show that they were by no means downhearted.

The march across was one long pageant of melody. "I'm going home to Dixie" was prime favourite, and splendidly they sang it in harmony. Then some evening hymns, then more rag-time—they were really excellent exponents of that difficult art—then "Onward, Christian Soldiers"; but never a note of "Tipperary." That immortal chorus had not yet "arrived."

The midnight train from Bristol to Reading. A wait of three hours. Finally, Aldershot (the wrong station) at 6.30 A.M. A march of four miles into camp somewhat took the spirit out of the men, breakfastless and carrying heavy kits. But we rallied them at the last post and came in singing "Somewhere the sun is shining," like a choir of Welsh colliers. We certainly looked the part.

"We've been looking for you for a week;

where on earth have you been?" was hurled at us as we marched in.

The bombardier started upon a story which would have made that intrepid explorer Captain de Rougemont green with envy. I left him to his astonished audience and went off for a bath and shave before attending my own funeral at H.Q.

It will have been observed that there were varying degrees in the politeness with which successive H.Q.s greeted my touring company. The politeness with which Aldershot Headquarters now greeted me was well below freezing-point.

"I received your telegrams from Portsmouth and various other places," was the Chief's opening. "You appear to have been taking your men upon an extended holiday round the southern coast health resorts. May I inquire, without appearing too inquisitive, your authority for this expenditure of public money?"

"Will you allow me to explain, sir?"

"I am waiting for your explanation."

I began. When I had recounted the story of the A.S.C. major's arithmetical problem I saw that I had the Great Man's attention. As soon as I had caught the 5 P.M. train from Portsmouth——

"Sit down, won't you," said the Great Man; "cigarette?"

I took one from his proffered case and lit it carefully.

"If only I can hold him," thought I, "I shall pull through."

I did hold him, and I did pull through.

"I don't know that I can compliment you on your perspicacity," said the Great Man, "but I can see now where the blame lies. I had intended to withdraw your name from the Expeditionary Force, but——"

I got up, mouth open.

"Expeditionary Force?" It can only have been a feeble gasp which the Great Man heard.

"Am I going out with the Force?"

The Great Man smiled and put his hand on my shoulder.

"We'll overlook it this time. Let's see how well you can do your job. And if you send in your claim for travelling expenses, send it to me and I'll countersign it."

I suppose I must have said something by way of thanks. I suppose I must have saluted, and closed the door behind me. I know that I cleared half a dozen or so of the stairs down at a bound and fell over an astonished sentry at the bottom. It must have looked most un-

dignified in a Gunner captain, but—I had actually been selected to join the British Expeditionary Force with a command of my own and——

I leaped into the waiting taxicab in a state of delirium.

The driver touched his cap.

"Where to, sir?" said he.

"Where to? Where to? Oh! Brussels; anywhere."

The driver grinned in sympathetic understanding and got on to third speed in as many seconds.

And that is how I very nearly missed the most gorgeous adventure of my life.

CHAPTER II

THE SAILING OF THE FORCE

Follow, follow!
Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy;
And leave your England as dead midnight still.
. . . . .
For who is he, whose chin is but enrich'd
With one appearing hair, that will not follow
These cull'd and choice-drawn cavaliers to France?

"I consider that I have command of the sea when I am able to tell my Government that they can move an expedition to any point without fear of interference from an enemy's fleet."—Sir Geoffrey Hornby.

Train No. B46 had slipped unostentatiously into its appointed siding precisely on its scheduled time. For a couple of hours the men had been working like galley-slaves to get the ammunition on board in time. The C.O. and two other officers with their coats off were working as hard as the rest. And it is no joke heaving up and packing neatly cases of 18-pr. and howitzer shell, especially when you are not used to it.

Finished at last, and with half an hour to

the good. Another four hours and they will be on the road themselves, the first step into the unknown.

A couple of hours' sleep, a shave and a bath, a final look round the battery office, a last hurried breakfast in the Mess, and a last hand-shake with the colonel.

"You off? Well, good-bye, and good luck to you. We shall meet over the other side, I expect."

The battery parades. "Battery all present, sir," reports the sergeant-major. The report runs through until it reaches the C.O. A few minutes to ride round the teams and then:

"Column o' route from the right. Walk—march!" and the battery is off through the early morning quiet of the Aldershot streets, bound for the port of embarkation.

Thus the mounted units, or most of them. Others by train. A few lines will serve as description for all these.

A Railway Transport Officer meets the C.O. on the platform as the men march in.

"Get your men in as quickly as you can, please; we always get off five minutes ahead of time."

"What's our port?" asks the C.O.

"No idea. Push on, please."

The C.O. "pushes on."

"All in," he reports to the R.T.O., and turns for a final shake of the hand.

"Well, good-bye, and good luck" (always that phrase); "wish I was coming with you."

The R.T.O. gives the signal and looks wistfully for a moment after the train before he clambers across the metals to dispatch another dozen or so units from other sidings.

"Where are we embarking?" asks everyone. Not a soul knows. I don't believe the engine-driver himself knew. He just went gaily forward following the points or stopping for signals.

"Through Winchester! Why, it must be Southampton. Wonder what our port will be the other side?"

Detraining and embarkation at Southampton were carried out under the same admirable conditions of efficiency and speed, and with never a single hitch. It seems little enough to read the sentence in cold print, but the more one thinks about it the more wonderful appears the organisation. Had it been the German War Staff directing movements the affair would have seemed no more than an ordinary episode. But with memories of the South African War,

and a hundred everyday incidents constantly revealing muddling, red-tape methods, one can find no words in which to express adequately one's admiration for this astonishing volte-face.

One single incident, one of fifty like it, will show to what excellent purpose the Authorities had profited by experience, even in those early days.

An A.S.C. motor transport unit was detailed to embark upon a certain ship. Nearly a day's warning had been given to the O.C. The lorries were driven to the dock-side and were just being got on board. The Embarkation Officer, who was standing quietly by, suddenly informed the C.O. that his ship was not that one but another due to sail from another dock some distance away.

The C.O. had barely time in which to get his lorries across, and the ship sailed the moment all was reported clear.

An incident trivial enough, and how un-English it seemed at the time. But after the secret landing of the 9th Army Corps at Suvla, and the subsequent evacuation of Gallipoli, it would appear that we have nothing to learn in the art of ruse.

The weather in those early days of August was perfect: the sea so calm that there was no

discomfort even with the men and horses packed on board like sardines in a tin. If it was a night crossing, the men bedded down in rows out on the decks just as they had filed on board. The transports were of all kinds, from an Atlantic liner to a coasting tramp.

The ship's officers did more than their best for everybody's comfort, giving up their cabins to the officers, sharing their meals and refusing to accept any payment for food and drinks. If the skipper of a certain ship of the Royal Mail Company, which sailed on the early morning of August 16th from Southampton, chances to see these lines I would tell him how gratefully his kindness is remembered, and how the little mascot, in the shape of a tiny teapot from the steward's pantry, brought the best of luck through ten months' hard service, always made excellent tea whenever called upon, and now occupies a place of honour in my china cabinet. Here's wishing everything of the best to those who carry on the fine traditions of the blue or red ensign!

"Well, where are we bound for?" This to the First Officer.

"Don't know a bit," he replies. "The skipper *may* know, but I'm not sure. Anyway he's as close as a barnacle about it."

The Sailing of the Force

We steamed across Channel with all lights on. It was another of those astonishing facts which didn't strike one until later. We were off the mouth of the Seine exactly twelve hours after sailing. And all that time we only once sighted anything in the shape of a convoy, and that was a T.B.D. for about twenty minutes a couple of miles to starboard.

At this stage it seems almost invidious to say anything more about the work of the Grand Fleet during that first fortnight. And yet, even now, the public is amazingly ignorant of what the Navy has accomplished, or, indeed is still accomplishing. Ignorant, not through indifference, but because the Authorities still steadily refuse to take seriously in hand the work of education in war facts and ideas.

How the Navy succeeded in sweeping the enemy flag from the North Sea and the Channel in a couple of days, apparently without firing a shot, we cannot pretend to guess. Some day the story will be told. But the result was the most astonishing manifestation of the real meaning of naval supremacy that the world has ever seen, or is ever likely to see. And Germany, by her naval inaction, lost for ever her great chance of the War, and so, in failing to intercept or damage the British Expeditionary

Force, failed also to enter Paris and to end the war upon her own terms within the period she had intended. The British Army may have saved Paris, but the British Navy enabled it to do so.

Entering the Seine the skipper revealed the name of our destination, Rouen. Another instance of organisation and forethought on the part of the Authorities in using small ships so as to get right up the river and disembark troops and stores well inland.

Again, this has become a matter of everyday routine, but in those days each such new manœuvre was sufficiently remarkable for admiring comment.

Here the pilot came on board. A typical old son of Normandy he was, grizzled and weatherbeaten, clambering aboard with stiff heavy gait.

On to the bridge he climbed: saw our lads clustered thick as bees in the fo'c'sle and lower deck. Up went his cap into the air, tears sprang to his eyes.

"Vivent les Anglais!" he shouted, "vive l'Angleterre! A—ah" (with an instinct of triumph), "ça va bien. Ils arrivent."

How the lads yelled in answer.

"Cheer-o, moossoo. Veeve France! 'Who's

your lady friend?' 'For he's a jolly good fellow,' ''—and other pertinent observations.

Then, to my astonishment, they burst into the "Marseillaise." How and where they had learned it I have no idea. But sing it they did, and very well too. They took that little curly bit in the middle, where a B flat comes when you least expect it, just like an old hunter clearing a stiff post-and-rails. And that old chap stood on the bridge and mopped his eyes, and didn't care who saw him do it. The English had really come to stand by his beloved France. *Comme ça va bien!*

That was the first hint we had of the reception which awaited us.

You picture the transport steaming slowly up river between the high, wooded banks. Little houses, such as Peter Pan might have built for Wendy, seem to sway dizzily in the tree-tops. Out on to the verandas, down to the river path run the women and children, and the few old men who remain. Everyone carries a little flag; not the French tricolour, but the British Jack—or rather an excellent substitute.

Dimly one can see the waving hands, faintly across the water echo the treble voices. But we know now what it means, and gallantly

our lads respond to this welcome of our future hosts, who, with true French courtesy, have met their guests at the very entrance gates.

Far up the hill-side, close under the ridge, there nestles a tiny cottage. A blot of deep crimson staining the deeper green of the trees makes me take out my binoculars. The good house-wife, with no British flag available, yet determined to do honour to her country's allies, has taken the red tablecloth, has stitched long bands of white across it to form a St. Andrew's Cross, and flung it proudly across the balustrade. What monarch ever had truer-hearted welcome from his own people? Well, the sight brought a lump to the throat of at least one Englishman.

And so slowly we steamed up the historic river. France had indeed flung wide her gates in welcome. Here we found ourselves moving in a small procession of transports. Greetings swung across from one ship to the next, to combine and roar out a British answer to our French friends on shore.

Ah! but it was good to feel that Britain had not failed France, though the obligation were no more than a moral one. It was good to be an Englishman that day; good to feel that

Englishmen then in France could now look Frenchmen squarely in the face and say:

"You thought we were going to stand aside, didn't you? Well, you see we are coming in with you and you can bet that means that we intend to see it through."

Yes, one felt proud as never before.

CHAPTER III

THE LANDING OF THE FORCE

" Shall not thou and I, between Saint Dennis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople, and take the Turk by the beard ? "

THE dominant note in the reception which the French gave to the Force on landing was undoubtedly that of *relief*. Happy in showering little courtesies, surprised and delighted with everything British—all these, but it was relief which came uppermost in their minds. The feeling which the old pilot had expressed in his " comme ça va bien, maintenant."

And as transport after transport slid quietly to her berth alongside the broad Rouen quays, discharged her freight of men, horses, guns, stores, lorries, and the countless trappings of a modern army, and then as quickly and noiselessly vacated the berth for her successor, so increased the wonder and delight of the good Normandy folk.

That *les anglais* should really have arrived

was splendid enough, but that they should also bring with them their own food and cooking arrangements—"mais c'est étonnant! et quelle organisation!"

Everyone spoke in admiring comment about it. And how Rouen crowded down to the quays or out to the rest camps to watch *les anglais* cooking their dinners! Army stores those few days were sadly depleted of tins of jam, biscuits and "grocery ration." How could one refuse the hungry look in the eye of a motherly matron as she espied a packet of the famous English tea?

And the children! We learned for the first time how hungry children could be when they saw biscuits and jam.

Make a fuss of the kiddies and you have won the mothers! And if you have won the mothers and women of France you have conquered "la belle France" herself. And *les anglais* conquered France in those few days at the French ports. The happiest of victories, and one which augured well for the future.

Nothing pleased the French more than British courtesy and gentleness to women and children; and their kindness to and care of their horses. British love of personal cleanliness, and the unfailing cheeriness of the men,

these have, of course, long since become proverbial. But then it was all new to France, almost to the world, and so one records these things as first impressions.

And the Scotties. Everyone knows how the lads from north of the Tweed made sad havoc among French hearts. Have they not always done so since Frenchmen and Scotsmen first clasped hands in alliance?

If a Scotsman was asked once a day whether he wore anything under his kilt he was asked a hundred times. And truth compels me to add that it was generally the ladies who put the question. What the answer was I never found out. I imagine that our lads were not sorry to hide their blushes in the troop trains which carried them forward to the frontier.

But all these little details have been so admirably recorded by Philip Gibbs in his masterly book, "The Soul of the War," that there is really not much more to tell. I shall have still a little to add in the next chapter, when it comes to trekking up country.

I had some little cause on the first day of landing to regret the exuberance of French hospitality. Half my men, they were mostly Special Reservists, suddenly disappeared into the unknown directly they set foot on shore.

And they hadn't a week's pay in their pockets either.

Eventually I got them rounded up and next morning there were twenty-five prisoners, "caps off," for "office." To say they were surprised is to give a very poor indication of their feelings when they found varying degrees of punishment awarded to them.

But this was nothing to the ludicrous expressions of the men when all the remainder were paraded and informed what they had to expect on active service. It ran somewhat as follows:

"When a sentry, sleeping upon his post." Punishment—DEATH.

"Leaving his C.O. to go in search of plunder." Punishment—DEATH.

"Forcing a safeguard."—DEATH.

"Quitting his guard without leave."—DEATH.

"Disobeying the lawful command of his superior officer."—DEATH.

And so on, the lightest punishment being about fourteen years' Rigorous Imprisonment.

Their faces got longer and longer as the list proceeded, and it was a very meek detachment who turned to their dinners on the quay-side. And that was the beginning and end of any

trouble with those good lads until the day when they, or the poor remnant who pulled through, crowded round to sing "Auld lang syne" and give me a farewell cheer. Fine work they did, and always as cheery and lovable as any unit in the Force.

Disembarkation was carried on with the same admirable efficiency which had characterised embarkation. A large number of British Staff officers had, I believe, crossed to France immediately upon mobilisation. There, in collaboration with French colleagues, every possible arrangement was made for the reception of the Force.

Rest camps were pitched or billets were allotted, branches of the Army Post Office were established, a field cashier was installed at the Banque de France and imprests in French notes for the men's pay could be obtained on demand.

Of course everybody had seized the few hours' holiday on board ship to write more or less lengthy letters home, hoping, in their innocence, that the ship's officers would post them on returning to England.

Alas! before ever the ship was berthed, an all-powerful bogy swarmed up the companion way and greedily snatched away the ship's correspondence. Calling for a brush and a

barrel of black fluid, he gleefully set to work upon the letters and postcards. When he had finished with them (and it took him a good couple of hours on our ship) they looked like the slips of paper you use in the parlour round-game where the first player writes a line and leaves the next to continue the sentence.

We had all given the most vivid description of our adventures, filling page after page. When the precious documents ultimately reached their destination, our fond parents, or best girls, must have been gratified to find that their four-page letter had dwindled down to :

"My dear Father,—

(Four pages of brush and fluid work.)

"Well, I think I have told you all the news now. My love to the Mater and, cheer-oh, we shall soon be home again.

"Your affect. son,

"____"

It was very interesting to compare the way in which French and British temperaments expressed themselves; intensely interesting to note how each so quickly became the complement of the other.

One knew so well the attitude of disdain of anything foreign which invariably characterises the Briton abroad; an unfortunate attitude which has been encouraged, or so it would almost seem, by the invariable courtesy, under the most irritating conditions, of men and women of the Latin races.

Here were some seventy or eighty thousand men thrust headlong into a strange country. Probably at least two-thirds of that number had never been out of England before. Everyone knows the impression which your average Englishman of the middle and lower classes has of French men and French women. Certainly it has not been very complimentary. How would our men now bear themselves?

And if our attitude to the French has for the most part been one of cold disdain and amusement, the French would seem to have regarded us, as a race, with incredulity, tempered by such a degree of irritation as their native courtesy would permit. This, together with an undercurrent of admiration.

"*Que j'aime la hardiesse anglaise!*" says Voltaire, "*que j'aime les gens qui disent ce qu'ils pensent.*"

During those early August days before the Retreat there was little real opportunity to

modify racial opinions. But if British disdain was not yet effaced, the overwhelming reception by the French went far to break it down. Soon it was to be washed clean away in the blood sacrament which united French and English in a closer tie than that of brothers-in-arms.

French methods and customs still amused our men, but the amusement became that light-hearted gaiety, in tackling and surmounting trifling difficulties in a foreign country, which is quite irresistible. Here the British soldier or sailor is always at his very best, and the anecdotes of his adventures in French villages and towns would fill a volume.

Wiseacres who try to invent some universal language should certainly base it upon that of Thomas A. in a strange country. He is equally at home in China, Peru, the wilds of Africa or Spain.

The fact which astonished him more than anything else about the French language was that all the children spoke it. He could understand grown-ups learning it in time; but how the kiddies were able to talk it with such amazing fluency, that was quite beyond him.

As for the French attitude of mind, I am inclined to think that their incredulity, admira-

tion and irritation were all intensified; the last named, however, being even less in evidence than before.

The attitude of the French women is easier to define. It is literally true to remark that, from highest to lowest in the land, there were no half measures in their welcome. One can say this now because the fact has long since been recognised and openly discussed in France. This, however, is not the place in which to make more than passing reference to a subject which, apart from the purely human aspect, is more a matter for the student of physiology or psychology.

"Combien de cœurs vous avez ravagé dans un si petit délai que vous avez stationné ici," a French girl once remarked, "et cependant on ne devrait pas refuser aux anglais les baisers qu'ils nous demandent puisqu'ils se donnent pour nous."

And the last half of the sentence admirably sums up the French woman's point of view.

This landing of the portion of the Force at Rouen was typical of what happened at Boulogne or Havre. John Buchan, in his first volume of the "History of the War," has given a most interesting glimpse of incidents at the former port.

In no case did the troops remain at these bases for more than a couple of days. Nobody appeared to have the least idea of what was going on up at the frontiers, but time was obviously of importance.

No one knew where they were bound for; no one appeared to have the slightest presentiment of the tragedy, and the magnificence of the days which were so soon to crowd upon them. Still the cheery, light-hearted, end-of-term spirit. A summer holiday on the Continong! Cheer-oh!

And so they were merry parties of men which boarded the funny French trains; where you had to clamber up the sides of the carriages from platforms which didn't really exist, and where you were packed in like a Cup Tie crowd returning from the Crystal Palace.

How the horses hated those French trucks. Never before had they suffered such indignity. I would not have been a stableman on duty in one of those trucks for many a month's pay.

"Mais, quelles bêtes!" said the railway officials. And the porters would run and fetch the stationmaster and gesticulate at the Compagnie's trucks, which had begun to look like bundles of firewood long before the frontier was reached.

"Third return Clapham Junction, please," said the company wag.

"Wotto! Berlin! Not 'arf," shouted the rest. . . .

And off the trains would steam, every compartment labelled "Berlin." It's rather pathetic how history repeats itself. This time the French were silent. They *knew*.

So, forward into the unknown!

CHAPTER IV

UP COUNTRY

So be there 'twixt your kingdoms such a spousal,
That never may ill office, or fell jealousy,
. . . . .
Thrust in between the paction of these kingdoms,
To make divorce of their incorporate league :
That English may as French, French Englishmen,
Receive each other !

PATIENCE, still a little patience! The stage is not yet set. The actors have not yet reached the theatre. Very soon now shall you see unfolded the opening scenes of the Great Drama, and hear the first clash of the armies. Soon shall you have your fill of the horror and splendour of modern warfare.

We have seen the Force into the French troop trains, horse, guns and foot. But not all journeyed thus to the frontier. Some of the units, the most mobile, went by road. Units which were intended to take their places in the reserve lines, and especially the A.S.C. motor transport, ammunition or supplies. Let us move forward with one of these and see a little

of the France through which so soon the armies will come rolling back.

Out from Rouen and across the lovely Normandy country. You picture the excitement and amusement of the country folk as a great procession of those motor lorries, which we have seen coming into Avonmouth, pants heavily through the towns and villages.

Here is a part of a letter, from an officer in one of those units, which appeared in the *Times* towards the end of August. It seems to give a very happy picture of the French reception of our men.

Roses, Roses, All the Way

I can, of course, tell you nothing of our movements, nor where we are. I can, however, say something of the reception we have met with moving across country. It has been simply wonderful and most affecting. We travel entirely by motor transport (if the censor will allow that), and it has been flowers all the way. One long procession of acclamation. By the wayside and through the villages men, women, and children cheer us on with the greatest enthusiasm, and everyone wants to give us something. Even the babies in arms have been taught to wave their little hands.

They strip their flower gardens, and the cars look like carnival carriages. They pelt us with fruit, cigarettes, chocolate, bread, anything, and

everything. It is simply impossible to convey an impression of it all. One village had stretched across the road a big banner, "Honour to the British Army." Always cries of "Vivent les anglais, vive l'Angleterre," etc., and often they would make the sign of hanging, and cutting the throat (the Kaiser), pointing forward along the road. This always struck me as so curious.

Yesterday, my own car had to stop in a town for petrol. In a moment there must have been a couple of hundred people round, clamouring. Autograph albums were thrust in front of me; a perfect delirium. A tray of wine and biscuits appeared, and before we started again the car had come to look like a grocery delivery van with a florist's window display in front.

In another town I had to stop for an hour and took the opportunity to do some shopping. I wanted some motor goggles, an eye bath, some boracic, provisions, etc. They would not let me pay for a single thing, and there was lunch and drinks as well.

The farther we go the more enthusiastic is the greeting. What it will be like at the end of the war one cannot attempt to guess.

This all sounds like a picnic, but the work is hard and continuous. One eats and sleeps just when one can. There is no division between night and day. But we are all very fit and well, and the men, who have an easy time compared to the officers, look upon it as a huge joke—at present.

My French is, of course, simply invaluable, and

each day I can understand and talk better and better. It is extraordinary that I am absolutely the only officer I have come across (except one or two Staff men) who can speak it with any fluency.

Well, this will surely be the last of war amongst civilised peoples, and the dreams of the idealists will be fulfilled. The French seem to think that it will all be over certainly by Christmas. I wonder ?

Thus the men came to see something of French life away from the beaten track of the tourist, and, needless to say, they made friends at every stopping-place.

"Mais, si polis, ces messieurs anglais," everyone remarks. And how could "ces messieurs" refuse some little trifles in return for such hospitality? The word "souvenir" soon became a nightmare in their dreams. There was a peculiar bleat in the intonation of the word which was, after a time, positively hateful. But during the first few days the men gave readily enough all sorts of little articles for which they had no immediate use, and others for which they had.

Before a week had elapsed very few had any buttons left. It was a mystery how they kept their trousers up. Regimental badges on caps and shoulder-straps were much appreciated, especially the Gunners' letters. It did not take

long for the quick-witted French girl to discover that R.F.A. was obviously intended to represent the Triple Entente—Russie, France, Angleterre.

When these units eventually rolled up at their destination it was found that about half the men had lost not only all their buttons and badges but their caps as well, getting in exchange some horrible provincial product in the shape of a rakish tweed cap. Bits of tape and string held coats and trousers together.

But long ere this Thomas Atkins was fed up with souvenir-hunters, and one recalls a *Punch* picture which showed a weary and wounded soldier sitting by the roadside with what remained of his kit and arms.

"'Souvenir' is it you want?" he remarks in reply to a little urchin who is bleating the hateful word at him. "Here, you can take the —— lot." And he pitches his rifle and kit at the youngster's head.

The officers and men who came up by road must have had a very cheery time in the various towns where they were billeted. The route lay, I believe, by way of Amiens, and so up through St. Quentin and Bohain to Le Cateau.

Hardly was there a hint of war in all that lovely country-side. What war could ever touch

those glowing cornfields, those orchards heavy with plum and apple, the stately châteaux or dim cloisters of mediæval church or convent? As little can we conceive our fragrant villages of Kent or Surrey blasted and devastated by poisonous shells.

Very, very few men were to be seen anywhere; only Government officials and others over military age. Such guards or sentries as were posted were somewhat decrepit-looking Territorials, with arms and accoutrements which looked as if they had done good service in 1870. But they made up for their deficiencies in other respects by an excess of zeal in carrying out imaginary orders.

Their method of challenging, in particular, had the merit of simplicity and, at the same time, involved no undue straining of the vocal powers. It was merely the thrusting of a rifle-barrel into the face or chest of the passer-by. And when there is a very shaky hand on the trigger you don't lose much time in getting out your credentials.

One of these men caused much excitement one evening by holding up and clapping into the guardroom every single individual who attempted to pass him. He was performing sentry duty across a certain main road.

This went on for a couple of hours, and the guardroom was becoming uncomfortably crowded with a very miscellaneous assortment of travellers. In fact, when a particularly plump matron, carrying a basket of particularly evil-smelling cheeses, was incontinently thrust in, to fall heavily across the toes of an already irate railway porter, there was very nearly a riot.

At length a gilded Staff officer came along. He too was held up. But this time the sentry met his match. The officer demanded to see the N.C.O. of the guard. Whereupon the sentry, who was really somewhat the worse for drink, fell down upon his knees in the road, and with salty tears coursing down his cheeks piteously besought the officer to allow him to go home and get his supper.

But French Territorials did their "bit" gallantly enough a few days later, away on the British left. Old reservists as they were, they hung on splendidly at Tournai, and, led by de Villaret, fought gallantly against overwhelming numbers until they were surrounded, killed, or captured.

So, on through the golden August sunshine or beneath the heavy harvest moon. Interminable processions of columns, horsed and petrol-driven, threading their way along the endless,

poplar-lined roads of France; the white dust churned up and drifting over men and vehicles until they look like Arctic adventurers.

No one knows what is happening in the great "beyond." No one very much cares. "Let's get on and have it over," is the philosophy of the hour. "Expect those Germans are being held up a bit in Belgium; wonder where we shall come in?"

The enemy had marched in triumph through Brussels on August 20th. The British Force was not actually in position until two days later: and Brussels is only 30 odd miles from Mons.

After it was all over; after the tide of war had crashed forward almost to the gates of Paris and then rolled sullenly back, one saw a little of the devastation it had left behind. Here are two pictures.

* * * * *

August 20th. Can you, too, see that little vicarage hard by the tiny church? (Think, it might have been plucked from a Surrey hamlet.) The cool, veranda-shaded rooms filled with a hundred homely treasures; the tiled kitchen with its winking copper pots and pans. Out through the flagged yard, where pigeons coo in gentle defiance of predatory sparrows, and down

to a miniature farmstead. The pretty alleyed garden of roses, hollyhocks and the flowers and sweet herbs of English garden-lovers.

Can you see the old curé as he browses over a volume of Renan? He has tended his flock in that village for a quarter of a century. A pretty niece keeps house for him; and her dainty herb-potions and unwearied nursing have saved many a life in the little community. They think of her as of an angel from heaven.

September 7th. A fortnight later! The village street has disappeared beneath the debris of what was once the village. One cow-shed is still miraculously intact, and from it creeps a gaunt, haggard old crone. *They* have not touched her. She was too old and infirm to make good fun, even for the rank and file.

She points with shaking finger to the wayside crucifix from which the Christ looks down with infinite patience. He also has been miraculously preserved. He gazes still over His tiny sanctuary, now but two blackened, battered walls. The vicarage has disappeared as though in an earthquake. The incendiary tablets have done their work well. The little garden with its pretty rose trees has been ploughed up, it would seem, by giant shares.

Stay, in one corner, down by the brook, there is planted a rough wooden cross.

The old curé had refused to leave his post when the stream of refugees had passed through. They told him of the horror behind them. He stood firm. Jeannette, too, would stay with her uncle.

They came. The curé, they said, must be a spy left behind by the French troops. Besides, he had carrier-pigeons. "What need have we of further witnesses?"

And so they tied him against the stem of his pigeon-cote. He met his death as a gallant gentleman of France.

The girl. Ah, young and tender! Good sport for the plucking! First let her bury the old man. "Rather hard work using a spade when you're not used to it, isn't it?—Done? Good, now get us dinner."

After dinner, a dance — Eastern slave fashion. First, good sport for the officers. "When we have finished throw her to the men."

What need to tell the horrors of it? The village marked the ebb of the tide. The French and British had turned at last. Hurried orders came to retire at dawn. The girl had not been such good sport after all—fainted too easily.

A leering, drunken satyr slashes at her naked breasts with his bayonet and Jeannette falls dead over the threshold. The house is fired, the body is pitched on to the pyre.

One village in France? No, one of a hundred where such things were done. And this is almost as nothing beside such as this England of ours has, by God's gracious mercy, been spared. What does England know of this war?

* * * * *

Now the various units begin to converge and concentrate on the French frontier. "Each unit," says the G.O.C.-in-Chief in his first dispatch, "arrived at its destination in this country well within the scheduled time."

For some days past the French troop trains have been disgorging their living freight at a number of stations and sidings, most of them hastily improvised, within a few miles' radius on a line Valenciennes-Maubeuge.

The columns which came by road halted in various little villages about the town of Le Cateau. You will get the general lie of the land and the principal points of interest from the picture-map.

Now to set the stage.

CHAPTER V

THE MARSHALLING OF THE ARMIES

Now entertain conjecture of a time,
When creeping murmur, and the poring dark,
Fills the wide vessel of the universe.
From camp to camp, through the foul womb of night,
The hum of either army stilly sounds,
. . . . . .
. . . . . *and from the tents,*
The armourers, accomplishing the knights,
With busy hammers closing rivets up,
Give dreadful note of preparation.

A WELL-KNOWN American, it was probably Roosevelt, remarked à propos of the outbreak of the War that Germany's readiness would redound to her eternal dishonour, while Britain's unreadiness would be to her eternal honour.

The term "unready" applies to the nation as a whole. Fortunately for civilisation the British Navy and the little striking Force were, as we have seen, kept trained to an hour. And so it was that, upon a single word, the whole machine moved precisely as the admirable organisation had planned for it.

It must also be remembered that for some

years past everybody who had studied international affairs with any intelligence knew precisely how and where Germany would attack; that even in 1908 it was possible to give the approximate date of such attack; and that when the attack came the position of the British Expeditionary Force would be in the post of honour upon the left of the French line in, approximately, the district in which it actually deployed.

Thus, up to a certain point, events fell out as anticipated. But one or two big factors were not foreseen, or, at least, not sufficiently appreciated. These were the amazing speed and mobility with which the German initial attack was destined to develop; the overwhelming numbers of the enemy; and, lastly, the astonishing effect of big gun fire, as instanced at Liége and other fortresses. This lack of foresight came within an ace of losing the war for the Entente Powers.

It was not until Saturday, August 15th, that the gates into Belgium by way of Liége were fully opened for the German armies, although Liége itself had been entered on the 7th.

The immediate effect, apart from the great moral value, of Belgium's heroic and successful

resistance of those two or three days was to give to the British Force at least a sporting chance. The Force was late; those three days allowed it to get into position. It needs no great effort to imagine what would otherwise inevitably have happened.

Now let me at this point disclaim any intention of giving details of strategy and tactics, even were I sufficiently competent to do so. So far as I can I shall try to tell the story as simply as possible, omitting everything which may tend to confusion or which may render necessary continuous reference to maps. In a word, I am making this record of facts and impressions for the public, not for the experts. It is the human side and not the military which I would emphasise.

It is, however, necessary at the outset to get a good general idea of numbers, and the disposition of the armies on August 22nd in the particular area, if we wish fully to appreciate the events, and their significance, of the succeeding ten days. For the sake of convenience I will make sub-headings:

The German Forces

The total strength, all ranks, of a German *Army Corps* is, roughly, 45,000; of a *Division*,

roughly, 17,500. We may take this as a minimum.

Each Corps and each Division has, respectively, about 160 and 72 field-guns, and 48 and 24 machine-guns. The numbers of the latter arm were materially increased during 1913-14.

The German forces which concentrated on this far Western front, from Namur to about Tournai, consisted of no fewer than 13 Army Corps, *each Corps being augmented by an extra Division*. These Reserve Divisions were, I believe, combined into separate "Reserve Corps."

The Corps were divided up :—

5 under von Kluck (First German Army), attacking British.
4 under von Buelow (Second German Army), attacking 5th French Army.
4 under von Hausen (Third German Army), attacking 4th French Army.

The general lines of advance will be seen in plan A (page 71) and plan B (page 98).

Thus, the total German force concentrated on or about this immediate front must have numbered at least 812,500, with, say, 3,016 field-guns and 936 machine-guns.

It is not unreasonable to add to this total

the not inconsiderable number of cavalry which operated, more or less independently, on the extreme flanks, and particularly from Tournai down through Amiens towards Le Havre.

The French Forces

The total strength, all ranks, of a French Army Corps is, roughly, 40,000, with, say, 160 field- and 48 machine-guns.

In this area there were present 3 corps under Lanrezac (5th French Army) holding the line Charleroi—Namur, and 3 corps under de Langle de Cary (4th French Army) holding a line west of the River Meuse south-west from Namur.

Away on the left flank of the British was another Corps, of Territorials, under d'Amade; and near Maubeuge, in reserve, were two or three Cavalry Divisions. These last did not, I believe, operate; and the Territorials were also fully occupied in their own area.

Reckoning up, then, we get an approximate total of, say, 240,000 men, 960 field- and 288 machine-guns.

The British Forces

A British Army Corps, of two Divisions, contains about 36,145, all ranks, with 152 field- and 48 machine-guns.

A Cavalry Division contains about 9,270,

all ranks, with 24 field- and 24 machine-guns; a Cavalry Brigade about 2,285, all ranks, 6 field- and 6 machine-guns.

This is not revealing State secrets, because the numbers may be obtained from any military reference books.

Now it was, I believe, originally intended that the Expeditionary Force should be about 120,000 strong, or half the strength of the army with the colours.

The force actually present at Mons on August 22nd consisted, nominally, of two Army Corps, a Cavalry Division and a Cavalry Brigade. But several authorities, including Mr. Hilaire Belloc, assert that one of these corps was considerably below strength, and that, in round numbers, the strength of the Force was no more than 75,000, with 250 guns.

If we calculate up the *official* strength the numbers should work out at 83,845 all ranks, 334 field- and 126 machine-guns.

Another Infantry Brigade came up on the 23rd and joined the Second Corps, and another Division (the 4th) also arrived.[1]

[1] Until Wednesday the 26th, the 19th Brigade was acting directly under orders from G.H.Q. On that date, being isolated, it was appropriated by the Second Corps. The 4th Division detrained at Le Cateau and took up position in and about Solesmes to cover the retirement.

Taking everything into account it is, I think, reasonable to put the British strength at about 80,000 men, 300 field- and 100 machine-guns when battle was first joined.

Let me put these figures in tabular form so that we can get a comparison at a glance.

Actual Approximate Numbers on August 22nd

	All ranks.	*Field-guns.*	*Machine-guns.*
British	80,000	300	100
French	240,000	960	288
German ...	812,500	3,016	936
Excess German strength over Franco-British	492,500	1,756	548

It is always rather difficult to grasp the *meaning* of big numbers like these, so let me put it another way.

Place one German against each man in the Franco-British Force, and one German field-gun against each field-gun on our side. Now take all the German soldiers and guns still remaining over and imagine that you are watching them march past you down Whitehall, the men in fours all doing their "goose" parade step and the guns going by at a trot.

The army, marching night and day, without a moment's halt, would take just about three days to pass you.

Such then was the enemy superiority; about four or five times as great as the most pessimistic prophets had anticipated. We shall see shortly what this superiority developed into against the British Force.

The Position of the Forces

British.—The general position of the opposing forces before battle was joined, at least for the British, will be realised from plan A (page 71), and there is little need to add anything by way of explanation.

It will be noted that the British line extended along a front of about 25 miles, with Mons near the centre of the line. On Saturday, August 22nd, Sir John French disposed the Force into its positions. The Second Corps, under Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, held the canal line from Condé, on the west, to Mons, on the east. The First Corps, under Sir Douglas Haig, extended from Mons, on the west, to Binche, on the east.

As there were no British reserves, the Cavalry Division, under General Allenby, was detailed to act as such and to be ready to move forward where and as required.

The 5th Cavalry Brigade, under Sir Philip Chetwode, was posted in and around Binche.

French.—I have indicated the composition of the French force, and plan A (page 71) will show how it was disposed on the morning of the 22nd; i.e. 5th French Army from Charleroi to just south of Namur, and 4th Army down the River Meuse to south of Dinant.

Similarly, there is nothing further to add about the German dispositions if the general lines of the enemy advance be noted: an attempted out-flanking movement on the extreme west, and the driving in of a wedge in the neighbourhood of Namur. These, together with heavy frontal attacks.

In all that follows it is necessary to add in, by way of reinforcements on the German side, the very great moral encouragement which the enemy had received by their triumphal passage through Belgium. They were in overwhelming strength; their heavy guns had crushed the fortresses in a few hours like so many egg-shells; they had, for many a long year, believed themselves invincible as against the world; and now they were marching directly upon Paris with the confident hope that within three months France would have ceased to exist as a nation,

and that by the end of the year the war would be finished, with terms of peace dictated by their all-highest and supremely-powerful deity, the Kaiser.

It was, too, not merely an army disciplined and trained in the minutest details of war which was thus bludgeoning forward into France; it was, in effect, a nation in arms. A nation which, for many a long year past, had been educated to regard war as the greatest of all earthly things—a supreme issue to which all the sciences and arts of the preliminary years of peace were to be directed.

It was a nation which regarded as fully legitimate any means whatever to the supreme end desired.

I recall a remark made to me during the South African War by a Prussian naval officer.

"You English," he said, "do not know the rudiments of war. When the day comes for us to go to war you shall see how we deal with the men, women and children. With us terror is our greatest weapon."

To-day the world knows how that weapon has been mercilessly wielded; and how impotent it has been.

On her side Britain was equally united, but in a different sense. She had taken up the

gauntlet because her people were assured that the cause was a just one. In those early days the Expeditionary Force was not concerned one way or the other with the reasons for its presence in France. The men were, for the most part, quite ignorant of the facts; they were there as a professional army to do their "bit," as they had often had to do it before, and I cannot recall a single instance during the first month where the men spoke of the meaning of the war.

In numbers they were hopelessly insignificant beside the enormous masses ranged against them, but, for its size, the army with the colours has always been recognised the world over as without a peer.

There was, however, one factor which in no small degree tended to level the balance. Discipline in the Germany Army meant discipline in the mass, by regiments or companies, under constant supervision of officers and N.C.O.'s. In the British Army it meant discipline of the individual. In a word, if a British soldier finds himself alone in a tight corner he generally knows how to get out, if it is humanly possible. The German, accustomed from his childhood to be dry-nursed in every trivial detail of his everyday life, would be hopelessly at sea when forced

to act on his own initiative. When properly led the German is splendidly courageous, and in this respect, quite apart from numbers and *moral*, it was an exceedingly tough proposition which French and British were up against at Mons.

As regards the French it is rather more difficult to estimate their outlook in the early days. From their experience in 1870 they knew what war with Germany meant, both in the actual fighting and in the nameless atrocities which the enemy committed on the civil population. Thus they wanted their revenge.

But France had not yet suffered in this war. She had not yet seen her borough officials taken as hostages and murdered in cold blood; her older men sold into slavery; her women raped and mutilated; her infant children impaled upon the bayonet and thrown into the fire; her Cathedral of Rheims tortured and desecrated. All this was yet to come.

At the beginning they fought valiantly but blindly. The shock was too sudden and overwhelming. Mistakes were made in the higher commands.

But within the month France awoke. The Soul of her still lived; and it was the Soul of a nation which was mighty many a generation

before ever Germanic tribes had banded together in primitive community.

The Soul of France awoke in every one of her children. Not one, man, woman or child, but saw the way clear before him, but felt the grip of steel-cold determination to follow that path straight to the end.

Such was the France which turned at bay before the very gates of her capital, to show the world that the doom of civilisation's enemy was irrevocably sealed.

CHAPTER VI

MONS

"If the English had any apprehension they would run away."

. . . . . .

"That island of England breeds very valiant creatures: their mastiffs are of unmatchable courage."

THE dawn of Sunday, the 23rd, broke dim and misty, giving promise of heat. From the late afternoon of the previous day squadrons and reconnaissance patrols from Chetwode's Cavalry Brigade had been pushing well forward on the flanks and front of the British line. They were regiments with names "familiar in our mouths as household words": 12th Lancers, 20th Hussars and Scots Greys.

It was pretty though delicate work this feeling forward to get into touch with enemy outposts and patrols. Nor was there a troop which did not have some story to tell that evening of a tussle with enemy cavalry, with its ending, happy or otherwise, determined by the more wide-awake patrol.

In one place an officer's patrol, moving quietly out from a grassy forest track, stumbled

straight upon a dozen Uhlans having a meal. The British had no time to draw swords, and certainly the Uhlans hadn't, it was just a question of riding them down, and swords and pistols out when you could.

In another place a German and a British patrol entered a village simultaneously from either end, unbeknown to each other. The turn of a corner and they were face to face. Our men were the more wide-awake, and they got spurs to their horses and swords out before the enemy grasped the situation. The little affair was over in five minutes.

But as our cavalry pushed farther and farther northwards they found themselves confronting ever-increasing numbers, and retirement became necessary.

Thus were the first shots fired.

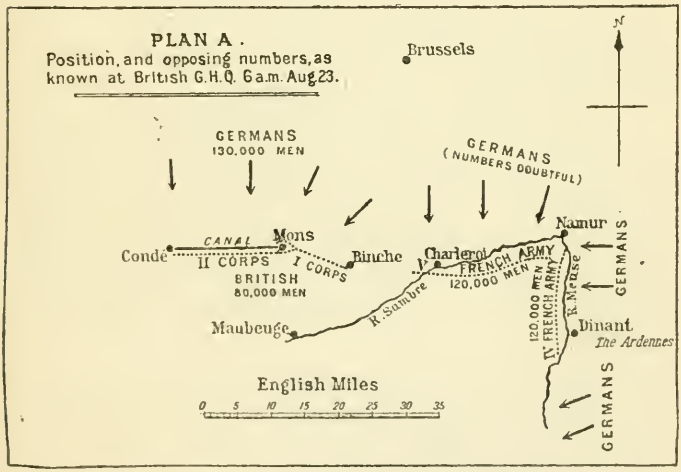
At six in the morning of this Sunday, Sir John French held a "pow-wow" with the three G.O.C.'s, Generals Haig, Smith-Dorrien and Allenby, and discussed the situation, somewhat in these terms : [1]

"So far as I can see from the messages I've had from French H.Q. I don't think we've got more than a couple of Corps in front of us,

[1] I have simply turned paragraphs of Sir John French's dispatch into imaginary spoken words.

perhaps a Cavalry Division as well.[1] And it doesn't look as though they are trying to outflank, because the cavalry have been right out there and didn't meet with much opposition; nor do the aircraft appear to have noticed anything unusual going on. It'll be a big enemy superiority, but I don't think too big if we've got dug in properly and the lines are all right. We ought to hold them when they come on. The French, as you know, are holding our right, Namur, and down the Meuse."

Here is a plan to show the situation as it was known at G.H.Q.:



[1] A German Cavalry Division numbered, approximately, 5,200, all ranks, including 2 batteries Horse Artillery and 1 machine-gun battery.

The morning wears on. You picture the country-side as not unlike one of our own mining districts, the little villages and low-roofed houses giving that curious smoky, grimy effect of mean suburbs bordering on a large industrial town. Here and there great heaps of slag or disused pits and quarries; gaunt iron stems carrying great wheels and heavy machinery.

The soldiers are billeted all through the houses or make a shake-down in odd barns and yards. Look over the garden gate of one little house and you will see the company cooks of one regiment getting the Sunday dinner ready, peeling the potatoes, swinging the pots on to the camp fires.

From a barn hard by you'll hear the sound of singing. A padre has looked in as the rollicking chorus of "Who's your lady friend?" swung out into the roadway, and with gentle interruption has improvised a short service, suggesting "Rock of Ages" as a substitute for the music-hall ditty.

Down the road a couple of sergeants of the West Ridings lean idly over a gate smoking and watching the folk going off to Mass.

Out over the canal line the men are hard at work trench-digging, pausing now and again to

look skywards as the drowsy hum of an aeroplane propeller sounds over them. Whether the machine is friend or foe they have no idea.

Three girls saunter down the road, arms round waists, and stop to look with interest and amusement at some of the West Kents washing out their shirts. One of the men is stripped for a wash and Marie exchanges a little repartee with him, to run off laughing as a burly lance-corporal plants a sounding kiss on her cheek, by way of finishing the argument.

So peaceful it all is, with just that undercurrent of excitement which the presence of strange troops would give. Imagine a Lancashire or Yorkshire village on a summer Sunday morning and you have the picture.

It is now eleven o'clock and the people are streaming home from church. The service seems to have been cut rather shorter than usual and there is just a hint of anxiety to be seen on their faces. What was it the curé had said, something about keeping quiëtly in their homes and trusting *le bon Dieu?* But there is no danger, the English are here to protect us. Still, those aeroplanes have an ugly sound, something of *un air menaçant.*

Another aeroplane—and look, it has a great

black cross under the wings! Un Boche? No, it cannot be. Ah, see, see, a French one, ours! It goes to meet it. Mon Dieu! they fight! And dimly from the sunny heaven there falls the crackle of revolvers.

A motor dispatch-rider hurls himself from his machine straight upon the astonished group of West Kents.

"Where's the officer? Get moving; you're wanted up there!" and he jerks a thumb over his shoulder.

The men rush for their kit and rifles. Away to the west there is the crack of an 18-pounder.

Down the street the cyclist pants. A subaltern bursts in on the Sunday dinner of the Bedfords.

"Fall in outside at once!"

Another aeroplane sails over. It hovers for a moment over the Scottish Borderers in their trenches. A trail of black smoke drops down, and instinctively the men cower below the parapet. Slowly it falls. Nothing more. The men raise their heads.

"Eh, man, but a thocht yon werre one o' thae——"

A sudden, odd hum in the air, and then—crash!

The Scots corporal slowly and painfully drags himself out from the pile of earth and debris and looks round. There is a curious numb feeling in his right arm. He sits up with a dazed gasp. There is a hand by him on the ground. His? He looks at his arm, and realises. Near by five of his pals are laid out. He seems to have escaped.

"The Lord ha' mairey—but the regiment's fair blooded this day," and he falls back in a faint.

More aeroplanes, more trails of smoke; and, wherever they fall, within twenty odd seconds a German shell bursts fair and true.

All down the line there springs the crack of rifles. Beyond the canal the outposts of the Lincolns, Royal Scots and others are coming in at the double. A curtain of shell-fire is lowered behind them as the British batteries come into action. A curtain of fire rolls down before them as the German guns take the range.

It is now close upon one o'clock, and enemy shells have begun to creep nearer and nearer in from the suburbs upon Mons itself. The good curé and his words are forgotten, for what living things can remain? And so there begins that pitiable exodus of old men, women and children which streamed steadily southwards,

ever increasing as it crowded through the villages and towns.

But there is no time to-day to think of them. They must go, or stay and perish—anything so long as they do not interfere with the great game of War.

North of the town, where our lines necessarily bulged out, making a salient, the fighting was becoming desperate. Here three regiments especially (the Middlesex, Royal Irish and Royal Fusiliers) lost very heavily as they sturdily contested every yard of ground. This particular point had, from the first, been recognised as the weakest in the British lines.

Barely an hour since the first shots were fired, and now by one o'clock practically every gun and every rifle of the British Force is blazing away as though the powers of hell were set loose.

As yet it would seem that the ammunition is being merely wasted for the sake of making a noise. There is no enemy in sight save in the air the circling aeroplanes, and away on the flanks dimly-seen clouds of horsemen. A modern battlefield with its curious *emptiness* has so often been described that here one need only record the fact in passing. There is nothing to be seen. The men are firing, in the

first flush of excitement, at corners of possible concealment—the line of a hedge, the edge of a wood, the very occasional flash of a field-gun.

On the left, in the Second Corps, the British fire slackens somewhat as the men pull themselves together. No one has the foggiest notion of what is really happening. It is the officers' business of the moment to steady the ranks and keep them under cover.

But away on the right, out by Binche, where the Guards are, the storm has burst in fullest fury. No slackening there. The extreme right was held by battalions of historic regiments, names to conjure with: Munster Fusiliers, Black Watch, Scots and Coldstream Guards. Ah, those Guards! The glorious discipline of them! But how distinguish between any of the regiments that day, and after?

Almost from the first the senior officers began to realise that something was wrong, especially on the right. The Divisional Commanders and their immediate staffs, to whom the general idea of strengths and dispositions was known, began to wonder whether a big mistake had not been made. "Well, never mind, we're in for it now, we must do the best we can. But, those guns! There certainly should not be so many out there."

And it was positively uncanny how the German guns got their range. That fact struck everybody almost more than anything else. There appeared to be no preliminary ranging, as was always usual, but guns got direct on to the target at once.

It is difficult at times to avoid launching out into details which are of more interest to soldiers than to the general public, but as everything at this time was so new an occasional lapse may perhaps be excused.

Again, one's brain is so confused with such a mass of detail that it becomes most difficult to disentangle impressions and note them down in dispassionate language. If, however, the reader will take the little pen-pictures of incidents which are given and imagine them, not as isolated facts but as being reproduced fifty times all through the fighting lines, he may get a fair idea of the course of events.

* * * * *

As the day wore on that uncanny effect of the German fire increased. There is no doubt that it was mainly due to the amazingly efficient secret service of the enemy. The H.Q. of a division or a brigade, for instance, does not blatantly advertise its position, and yet time

and time again shells were dropped clean on to the particular building where the Staff happened to be. And when they got into another building, plump would come more shells.

Looking back it is a little curious to remember that even in that first week a very considerable percentage of our total casualties were caused by high explosive shell, and the shooting of them was astonishingly accurate.

Yes, the German guns did their work well, but they did not fully succeed in their object. Their local successes were great, especially against British guns and batteries.

Here is a British battery which has made two mistakes—it is not sufficiently concealed, the battery commander is perched up on an observation limber, and the guns are not far enough back behind the crest. (The Germans always "search" for some 300 yards behind crests of hills.) The B.C. is quickly spotted by an aeroplane observer and a perfect hell of fire is switched on by the enemy. In a moment telephone wires are cut, communications are broken, and within five minutes the gun detachments are wiped out.

The effect of a shell from the enemy heavier guns is overwhelming. The flank gun of the battery is hit, practically "direct." Some

R.A.M.C. men double up a few minutes later to help out the wounded. *There is nothing*, save a great hole, fragments of twisted steel, and—a few limbs of brave men. Nothing can be done except, later, dig in the sides of the pit to cover the remains.

The rest of the guns remain, but there is no one to work them. The horses, a little way to the rear, have also suffered badly. A subaltern officer staggers painfully through the tornado of fire from one gun to the next, slowly, deliberately putting them out of action, rendering them useless should the enemy come up to capture them.

Early in the afternoon Brigade Commanders have got orders round to the British lines to hold up the infantry fire as far as possible. It is now all well under control, for everyone realises that the artillery bombardment was a preliminary only, that the real attack is yet to come. The men have had their baptism of fire and magnificently have they stood it. This is discipline, and now they are ready for anything which may come along.

But already the casualties have been very heavy. Early in the day you have seen that company of the West Kents double up to the support of their battalion entrenched about half-

[*Photograph: C. Vandyk, Ltd.*

FIELD-MARSHAL VISCOUNT FRENCH.

way along the Second Corps line. I find a note in my diary: "W. Kents, Middlesex and Northumberlands" (they were all in the Second Corps) "decimated by shell fire." One or two companies of the W. Kents were, I believe, on outpost duty, which would mean that they were literally wiped out.

And, remember, the British trenches were not those of later days round Ypres. They had all been hastily dug in extremely hard and difficult ground, so that there were none of the niceties of snug dug-outs and bomb-proof shelters. In many places it was just a matter of scratching up the soil behind a hump of shale and cramming oneself in as far as one could go. To imagine, as one is led to do by some writers, that our men sat snugly in deep trenches through all that shell fire waiting calmly for the infantry attack is to get a hopelessly wrong idea. And if this was so on the first day when the men started in fresh, the conditions during the days which followed may be vaguely guessed.

Think for a moment of the splendid work the R.A.M.C. were doing all this time. I wonder how many V.C.'s were earned by that self-sacrificing corps during the week. It is easy enough to do what people call a gallant

deed with arms in your hands when the blood is up, to pick up a live bomb and hurl it away —little trifles of the moment which no one thinks twice about,—but the courage demanded in walking quietly into a hail of lead to bandage and carry out a wounded man, a feat which the R.A.M.C. men in the firing lines do a dozen times a day, *that* is worth talking about.

On our right the fight does not go well for us, and the suspicion that some mistake has been made becomes a certainty. If it is only a matter of two German corps and a Cavalry division in front of our position where on earth have all those guns come from?

Still the British guns out towards Binche go pounding gallantly on, hopelessly outmatched though they are. It's pretty shooting, for our 18-prs. can get in six or seven shots a minute more than the German field-guns, but we cannot compete against their heavier metal. And, just as in a naval fight, it is the heavier metal which tells.

The fighting on the right where General Lomax has the 1st Division has not slackened for a moment, but steadily becomes more intense. Now, for the first time, the enemy is really seen. And as his infantry begin an advance the German shell-fire redoubles in

intensity. Every house where British can be concealed, every possible observation post, every foot of trench, every hill-crest and 400 yards behind it is swept and devastated by the tornado.

What communication between units is possible in such a storm? Now battalions and batteries find themselves cut off from their neighbours, each fighting and carrying on by itself.

Chetwode's Cavalry Brigade is caught in the thick of it. The Guards are out there and they hold on almost by their teeth. The 1st Irish are in action for the first time since their formation. They'll see the Germans in hell before they're going to quit. The Munsters are in the hottest corner, if indeed you can see any degrees of difference.

The cavalry have to go; and the Munsters and Black Watch lose horribly as they cover the retirement. No finer fighting regiments in the world than these on the right, but nothing human can stay there and live. The little town of Binche is abandoned; the first enemy success that day. The First Corps has had to swing back its outer flank.

But if you think that the Black Watch, or the Guards, or any of them, have been sitting

there quietly to be shot at when there's an enemy in sight, you know little of those regiments. And you don't imagine that the Scots Greys, or Lancers, or Hussars, with such a reputation behind them, are going to sneak out of Binche by a back way without first getting a little of their own back.

No, if the Germans have got to have Binche they must bring up a great many more men than that to take it. There has been much talk of a repetition of that famous charge of the Greys, with the Black Watch hanging on to the stirrup-leathers. If indeed it was repeated that August then this must have been the moment. I am sorry to say that I have never been able to obtain any real confirmation of the story, so I shall not set it down.

But it might well have happened, and one likes to think that it did. Anyway, during that hour or so, there was many a gallant, desperate charge in that corner. A charge against overwhelming odds, when the utmost to be expected was the breaking and rout of the first two or three lines of the advance.

It needs no vivid flight of imagination to picture it. On the far outskirts of the town a railway line runs. Under the lee of a sheltering embankment and bridge the officers collect

and re-form some of the squadrons, now grown pitiably less in numbers. Words of command are almost inaudible, but the men understand. Hard by, on their left, you have the flanking companies of the line regiments. One or two brief messages pass to and fro between cavalry and infantry.

"The Greys and Lancers are going to charge the left of infantry advancing beyond the wood. Give them all the support you can!"

The British fire slackens from loophole and broken window. The Scottish regiment and the Coldstream Guards insist on taking a share. They cut out through the leaden hail and make some yards' advance, dropping again under what cover they can.

A last look round, a final pull at girth-straps, and the word is passed. The enemy infantry is 300 yards away.

"Tr-rot!" They are clear of the embankment. All well in hand. The enemy guns have not yet got them.

The Scots and Coldstream Guards make another rush and again drop.

"Can-ter!" And men and horses settle down into the steady swing. The infantry who have got the orders to support start blazing

away again as fast as they can get the magazine clips home.

Now the German gunners see what is happening and one gun after another drops its range and fuse. The German infantry is 250 yards away.

"Cha-arge!" No need to sound it. The officers are in front, and where the officers go their men will follow. Anywhere!

The Scots and Coldstreamers are after them as hard as they can leg it.

The enemy on the flank try to swing round to meet the charge, but there is no time. The German guns mercilessly drop the range still more—what matter if they sweep away their own men as well.

One hundred yards! Fifty yards! A long, sickening crash—and the Greys and Lancers are in them. Hacking, slashing, hewing! The Scots are hard on their heels just to their left. A mighty heave as the bayonets get home. The first rank is through. There are no more ranks, only a vast confusion.

Five little minutes (it seems an eternity) and the enemy flank is crushed in, smashed to pulp as a block of stone smashes in the head of a man.

"Who goes home?" Who can? Ten

men, a dozen, perhaps twenty have struggled through. A few will cover again the ground over which they charged. A few, such a tiny few, will get back under cover again. "The rest is silence."

But they have done it. The enemy have learned what a British charge is like. They know now what bayonet work is, and the lesson sinks deep. They will not face the steel again. Ask the men who fought at the Aisne, at Ypres.

CHAPTER VII

MONS (*continued*)

But pardon, gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dar'd,
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France?

It may be of interest at this point if the narrative be broken off for a few minutes to give some details of the methods the Germans employ in their infantry attack, especially as they differ so greatly from our own.

The two main features are (*a*) they consider rifle work as of comparatively little value and rely mainly on machine-gun fire, and (*b*) they attack in dense masses, shoulder to shoulder.

British methods are, or were, precisely the opposite. Our men have brought musketry to such perfection that an infantryman will get off in one minute almost double the number of rounds that a German will; and, what is more to the point, they will all hit the mark. Let it be noted that the British Army owes this

perfection to the wise foresight of Lord Roberts. (Ah, if only the nation, too, had listened to him!)

British troops, adopting the lessons of the Boer War, attack with an interval between the files, i.e. in extended order.

Now at Mons, and after, a German battalion generally attacked in three double ranks. The rear double rank had with it four or six machine-guns. They count upon the first three or four ranks stopping the enemy's bullets, but, by the time these are swept away, the last ranks (with the machine-guns) should be sufficiently near to carry the position attacked: say about 300 yards.

This reckless sacrifice of life is typical of the German "machine," as opposed to the British "individual."

As a matter of fact their method never succeeded over open ground before the British fire, for the front ranks were always swept away at the very beginning of the attack, and so they did not get near enough with the rear ranks.

The German officer who gave me these details remarked that the rapidity and accuracy of the British fire were simply incredible, that they never had a chance.

"Our men," he said, "have come to believe that every one of you carries a portable Maxim with him."

* * * * *

It must have been about 2.30 in the afternoon that Binche had to be abandoned. But it was before this that the German infantry attacks began all along the line.

For nearly two hours our men had somehow or other been weathering the storm of shrapnel, and we have seen that they had by now settled down under it. Let us get back to the Second Corps and see what is happening. You have got some idea of the look of the country in front of our positions, all broken up, uneven ground, little woods here and there. Out on the left flank there are county regiments, men of Dorset, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cheshire, Surrey. They know something about "ground" work, and they have learned a deal more with their regiments.

One end of the Yorks L.I. trench ends in a little stone-walled pigsty. At least it was a pigsty about church time that morning, but a German gunner thought it would look better without any roof or walls.

There is still a fragment three feet high on the weather side, and the Yorks C.O. finds it

a convenient shelter for the time being. He is not attending church-parade that day, so it doesn't matter about lying full length in the filth on the ground. The last remaining company colour-sergeant is with him — also embedded in the manure. They are both nibbling chocolate. Tobacco would be particularly useful just now, but they have both run out of it.

For some minutes the C.O. has been intently watching through his glasses the corner of a wood about 500 yards in front. He hands the binoculars to the sergeant.

"What do you make of it? That corner over the little shed."

The sergeant has a look. He returns the glasses and slowly nods.

"It might be a brigade, sir, from the number of them."

"Yes," says the C.O., "I thought it was about time. Get word along that there is to be no firing till the order's given."

"Very good, sir!" And the sergeant scrambles to his feet, salutes, ducks hastily as a shell seems to whistle past unnecessarily close, and dives into the rabbit-burrow in which his men are squatting. The C.O. returns to his glasses.

The C.O. of a British battery, in position

some distance to the rear, has evidently also spotted that particular target, for puffs of bursting shrapnel have begun to appear over the wood and round the edges.

Now there is a distinct movement of troops emerging from behind the wood. It is a movement only which can be seen, for the men themselves can scarcely be distinguished against the grey-green country-side.

At the very same moment it seems as though all the guns in the world have been turned on to those few miles of British front, and to the batteries behind.

The British gun-fire wavers for a minute or so; but soon it picks up again though, alas! not so strongly as before.

The Yorks C.O. has lost his enemy infantry for a minute; they are working forward under the edge of a rise in the ground.

Now the front ranks appear, and the C.O. gives a sharp whistle of astonishment. Four hundred yards off, and it looks like a great glacier rolling down a mountain-side.

Nearer still it creeps, and the German guns have raised their range to give their infantry a chance. "Besides, there will probably be nothing but empty trenches to take anyway," they say.

Fifty yards nearer, and the temptation is too great.

"Let it go, Yorkshires!" he yells down the trench. (The command is not in the drill-book, but it serves very well.)

And the Yorkshires "let it go" accordingly.

"Eh, lads," sings out a lad from Halifax, "'tis t' crowd coom oop for t' Coop Day! And t' lads yonder can't shoot for nuts," he blithely adds as myriads of rifle bullets whistle high overhead.

And he and the lads from Trent-side proceed very methodically to give "t' lads" from Spree-side a lesson in how shooting should be done.

Very methodically; but that means something like 16 shots a minute each man, and you may be sure that very, very few bullets go off the target. No one dreams of keeping cover. Indeed, the men prop their rifles on the parapet and pump out lead as hard as their fingers can work bolt and trigger.

Miss? It's impossible to miss. You can't help hitting the side of a house—and that's what the target looks like. It is just slaughter. The oncoming ranks simply melt away.

And now through the unholy din you can hear a cracking noise which is quite distinct in the uproar. Something like the continuous

back-fire of a mammoth motor-cycle. Machine-guns.

The Dorsets have got a man who is a past-master in the use of these infernal engines. How he escaped that day no one can tell. But for many an hour he sat at the gun spraying the enemy attack with his steel hose. His "bag" must have run into thousands.

The attack still comes on. Though hundreds, thousands of the grey coats are mown down, as many more crowd forward to refill the ranks.

Nearer still, and with a hoarse yell the Yorkshires, Dorsets, Cornwalls and others are out of the trenches, officers ahead of them, with bayonets fixed and heading straight at the enemy. A murderous Maxim fire meets them but it does not stop them, and in a minute they are thrusting and bashing with rifles, fists, stones, in amongst the enemy ranks.

Again the German gunners drop their range and pour their shells indiscriminately into friend and foe. It is too much for the attacking regiments and they break up hopelessly, turn and begin to struggle back. It is impossible to attempt any rally of our men. They must go on until they are overwhelmed by sheer numbers, or they must straggle to the lines as best they

can in knots of twos and threes, or wander aimlessly off to the flanks and get lost.

Such was one single attack. But no sooner was it broken than fresh regiments would march out to begin it all over again. And here is no Pass of Thermopylæ where a handful of men can withstand for indefinite time an army. What can the British hope to do against such overwhelming numbers? The end, you will say, must be annihilation.

The cavalry, the only reserves, are working, surely, as no cavalry has ever worked before. Squadrons are everywhere at once. Wherever a gap is threatened they are there in support. And wherever they go there also go the Horse Gunners working hand and glove with them. Charge and counter-charge upon the flanks of the attacking infantry, dismounting to cover with their fire a British infantry rally, fierce hand-to-hand encounters with enemy squadrons. Wherever they are wanted, each man and horse is doing the work of ten.

But this cannot last for long. Now it is becoming only too evident that far from there being a reasonable superiority against us the British are everywhere along the line hopelessly outnumbered in every arm. And at 5 P.M. there happened one of the most

dramatic incidents of the war, that day or afterwards. You will find the bare recital of the event set forth in cold official language in the G.O.C.-in-Chief's dispatch, beginning: "In the meantime, about 5 P.M., I received a most unexpected message from General Joffre."

It will be remembered that from information received from French G.H.Q. the previous night, and from his own reconnaissance reports, the Commander-in-Chief had concluded that his right flank was reasonably secured by the French armies, that the fortress of Namur was still being held, and that the enemy strength in front of him was about 134,000 men and 490 field-guns, at an outside estimate.

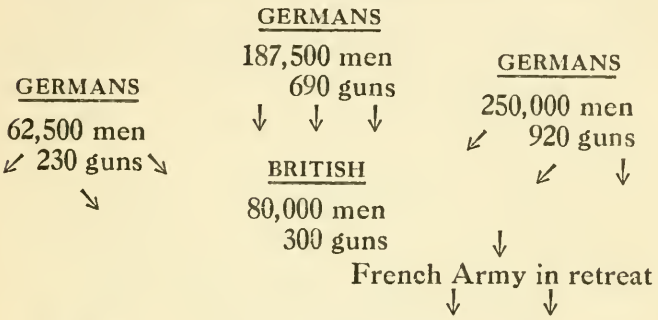
All the afternoon the enemy had been attacking, and the British right had had to give ground before it, with the consequence that Mons itself had to be abandoned.

Now, like a bolt from the blue, came the message from the French. "Unexpected," one would think, is a very mild term:—

"Namur has fallen. The Germans *yesterday* won the passages over the River Sambre between Charleroi and Namur. The French armies are retiring. You have *at least* 187,500 men and 690 guns attacking you in front; another 62,500 men and 230 guns trying to

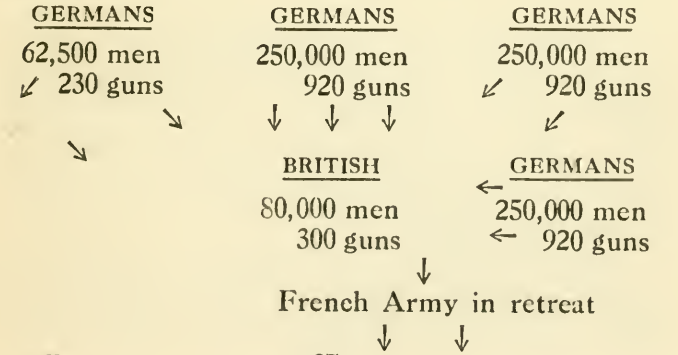
turn your left flank; and probably another 300,000 men" (the victorious army in pursuit of the French) "driving in a wedge on your right."

This is what the message would look like:—

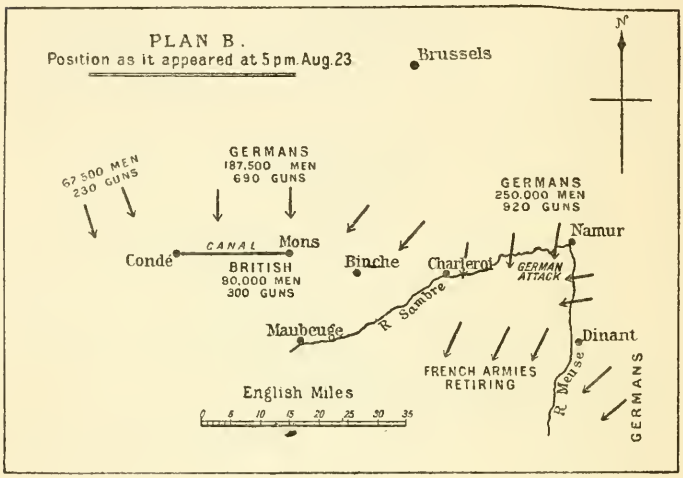


But we have seen that there were really thirteen German corps attacking the positions Tournai—Namur—Dinant.

Thus the *real* figures would probably look like this:—



We may, of course, take it that by the end of the day the figures were somewhat reduced all round, British and German; the German losses being "out of all proportion to those which we have suffered."



Such then was the situation at 5.0 P.M. on that eventful Sunday. An average of nearly four times our number of guns against us all along the position. No wonder that senior officers had guessed from the first that "something was wrong."

And G.H.Q.? You imagine, perhaps, that the municipal offices where the General Staff had its abode would now be seething with

excitement. You will picture Staff officers rushing from room to room; orders and counter-orders being reeled off; the Intelligence and Army Signals Departments looking like Peter Robinson's in sales week; an army of motor-cyclist dispatch riders being hurled from the courtyard towards every point of the compass.

Wrong! G.H.Q. that day, and the next, was less concerned than a little French provincial mairie would be on France's national fête day. The casual visitor would have seen less bustle of activity than at the Liverpool offices of a shipping firm on mail day.

The Postal Department: "Business as usual." Army Censor: Not much doing. Intelligence: Half a dozen red-tabbed officers looking at big maps with blue and red chalk-marks on them. Director of Ordnance Supplies: "Better see about moving rail-head a few miles farther south." A.G.'s (Adjutant-General) Office: "We shall want orders out about stragglers, what they are to do." And so on, all through the list. If this was an instance of that British phlegm which so amuses the French, then commend me to it! If anybody wanted a tonic against pessimism these days of the Retreat he only had to drop

in at G.H.Q. He would certainly come out with the conviction that we should indeed be home by Christmas, with the German Army wiped off the map.

Yes, that week which followed, indeed, welded into one "band of brothers" all the officers and men in the little Force. In those days everybody seemed to know everybody else. Regimental jealousy (if it ever existed) was obliterated completely, and every officer and man, from the General Officers Commanding Corps down to the bus drivers who drove the A.S.C. lorries, worked shoulder to shoulder. And so we pulled through.

Now there were other units in the Force besides those in the firing-line. There were all those columns which trekked up by road. Normally, most of these should be something like 15 miles to the rear. They know very little of what is going on ahead of them, though the ammunition columns can gauge fairly well by the demands made on them.

So it was that about midnight on that Sunday they began to realise back there that things were moving by a sudden and insistent demand for every scrap of rifle and 18-pr. ammunition they carried.

No sooner was that sent than there came more demands, and there was nothing to send. Wagons and lorries had trundled off at once to rail-head, but it would be hours before they could get back. Thus, on the very first day, the overwhelming nature of the situation pulled at and snapped the slender threads of communication. The threads were soon mended, but, as will be seen later, they never got properly into working order until the Marne.

Nor did those columns altogether escape disaster even at the very outset of the fighting. One, out towards the flank, was attacked and practically destroyed by raiding cavalry, for they do not work with escorts.

In one column, about 10.0 P.M., the alarm was given by an imaginative A.S.C. subaltern. What the men were to fight with is not clear, for only about 25 per cent. of the detachment had ever handled a rifle, and no ammunition was issued.

"It's Germans crawling through that field," said the subaltern. "I saw their electric-torch flashes."

The men stood to, peering into the darkness, and feeling certain that their last hour had come.

A farmer came slowly out of the field-gate

and begged two of the men to come and help him round up his *cows*.

So the detachment turned in again, cursing heartily.

But soon the A.S.C. bus drivers were "doing their bit" under fire as gallantly as everybody else. How and when you shall hear in another chapter.

6.0 P.M. — The enemy have concentrated their fire upon the town of Mons and it has become untenable.

Only six hours, six little hours since the Belgian townsfolk had come peacefully home from Mass to their Sunday *déjeuner*, proud and hopeful in the presence of their British allies. And now their houses, their town, a heap of smoking ruins.

In those short hours how many women have seen their children crushed by falling walls or blown to atoms by bursting shells? How many children are left helpless and alone in the world, with no mother or father to take them by the hand and guide them from the hell of destruction?

Is there no thought for them, you who have been following the fortunes of the day for the British? Many have escaped, with such few

household treasures as they can carry in perambulators and little handcarts. They, at least, have some hope of life. These may struggle on for a little while—to faint or die of hunger and exhaustion by the roadside. The strongest may get through.

For the rest, their lives are sacrificed to make a German holiday. They die, but in their death the battalions of these innocents have joined the mighty, mysterious army of souls who shall haunt the German people until Germany ceases to be.

C'est l'armée de ceux qui sont morts
En maudissant les Allemands,
Et dont les invincibles renforts
Vengeront le sang innocent.[1]

With such an overwhelming attack working forward in front and on both flanks the only problem left was how to get the British force away with the smallest loss. To remain obviously meant certain annihilation sooner or later. As a matter of course, possible positions in rear had long since been reconnoitred. They were not particularly good ones, but the best that were available.

[1] 'Tis the army of those who in dying
Have cursed the German flood—
And whose growing invincible forces
Will avenge all innocent blood.—Emile Cammaerts.

From earlier in the afternoon the Sappers had been at work on all the bridges crossing the canal, laying mines ready to blow them up in front of a possible successful enemy advance. By no means a pleasant task this, for the men were working under heavy fire practically all the time. But the Sappers are another of those corps of the Service which are well used to the kicks without the ha'pence, and nothing comes amiss to them. There is no regiment in the Army whose work merits recognition more than the R.E.; there is no regiment more surprised and pleased at receiving it.

As the dusk draws on the enemy fire has slackened a little, and the men in their trenches are here and there able to snatch mouthfuls of any food they happen to have handy. Most of them have not tasted anything since early morning, and they have been fighting hard all day. But there is no thought of rest.

The darkening night becomes red day as the glare of burning houses and buildings everywhere mounts to heaven in great shafts of light. It is such a picture as only a Rembrandt could give us on canvas.

The men sit or crouch wearily in their burrows, rifles always ready, heads sunk forward over the butts. Now and again there is

a momentary stir as a doctor or stretcher-bearers scramble through the debris to get at the wounded. The fantastic, twisted shapes of the dead are reverently composed and laid down on the ground. The belongings of them are carefully collected, with the little metal identity disc. So far as possible these will reach the wife, mother, or sweetheart at home.

Perhaps those evening hours of the first day's fighting were the most terrible the men were ever to know. The tension had very slightly relaxed, and the brain began once again something of its functions. They began to *feel* things. No one ever gets accustomed to being under the fire of modern warfare, and this was the first day of it. The horror of everything began to crush the senses. Soon physical and mental action became purely mechanical; men ceased to feel, but moved, fired a rifle, fed themselves, with the grotesque jerks of children's toys. But this was not yet. Now they were conscious, if but a little.

One man, a bugler in a county regiment, little more than a child in years, went raving mad as he staggered across a trench and fell, dragging with him a headless Thing which still kept watch with rifle against shoulder. His shrieks, as they pulled the two apart, ring even

now in the ears. He died that night, simply from shock after the awful tension of the day.

Consciousness came to the men, yet with it came also amazing cheerfulness even in the midst of the horror. But it was the cheerfulness not of high spirits but of determination, and of pity. They had fought through the day against an enemy which, even to men who did not understand, was in overwhelming strength; and yet they had been able to hold their ground. It was the cheerfulness which, at a word from their officers, would have taken them straight at the enemy's throat.

And pity, if it is to be helpful and sincere, must have behind it a gaiety of heart. No man in the world is more tender to helpless or dumb creatures than the British soldier or sailor; no man more cheerful. And no man in the Force but felt his heart wrung by the infinite pathos of the folk of Mons and round it. History will never record how many soldiers lost their lives that day in succouring the people who had put such trust in their presence.

And how many won such a distinction as no king can bestow—the love and gratitude of little children? One man, at least, I knew (I never learned his name) who, at the tears of two tiny mites, clambered into the ruins of a burning

outhouse, then being shelled, to fetch something they wanted, he could not understand what. He found a terror-stricken cat and brought it out safely. No, not pussy, something else as well. Back he went again, and after a little search discovered on the floor in a corner a wicker cage, in it a blackbird. Yes, that was it. And, oh, the joy of the girl mite at finding it still alive!

"Well, you see, sir," he said afterwards, "I've got two kiddies the image of them. And it was no trouble, anyway."

About 2 A.M. (the 24th) orders to begin retiring were issued from G.H.Q. Some four hours before a few of the units—those north of the canal—had begun to fall back; and so the beginning of the move was made. As the last of these crossed the bridges the detonator fuses were fired and the bridges blown up.

For the rest, the men crouched ever in their places, bayonets fixed, rifles always ready —waiting, waiting.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RETREAT BEGINS

The poor condemned English,
Like sacrifices, by their watchful fires
Sit patiently, and inly ruminate
The morning's danger.

To follow now the fortunes of the British Force you must imagine it, if you will, divided, like Cæsar's Gaul, into three parts. There is the First Corps, which still holds its position, save that extreme right by Binche; there is the Second Corps, which has begun at 3 A.M. to retire to a new position; and there is the Cavalry, Allenby's Division and the remainder of Chetwode's Brigade, which turns up wherever it is most needed to lend a helping hand.

If you glance through Sir John French's dispatch (at the end of the book) you will see that he had in mind to retire in what is called "echelon" formation. That is, one-half retires and takes up a new position, while the other half stays behind to act as a rear-guard and hold up enemy attacks. Then, in turn,

that other half retires behind the first half, and so on.

That was the idea, and on the first day it worked very well. But after that it was found simply impossible to keep to it, partly through the enemy's thunderbolt movements, and partly because our men became more and more exhausted.

Now, it is also a cardinal principle in rear-guard fights that you must not only check your enemy, but must also, whenever possible, make a counter-attack. In fact, the counter-attacks are part and parcel of the checking movements. This is where cavalry comes in very useful.

Let us, then, take the three divisions of the Force separately.

The First Corps

Night attacks, especially in the early morning (it sounds rather Irish), are horribly uncomfortable things. The nerves are continuously on edge and you are apt to loose off guns or rifles at the merest suspicion of a movement.

"If ye should see a wee brrown beastie in frront o' ye," a canny Scot sergeant told his men, "ye mauna fire, because likely it'll be a bit rrabbit, and rrabbits are guid for the pot. But if the beastie should walk upon twa legs,

then ye may ken it's no a rrabbit, but a Gerrman, an' ye will tak a verry quick but carefu' sicht o' him."

All through that Sunday night the men had snatched odd minutes of sleep just where they had fought through the day. And very little rest did the enemy allow them. For one can well imagine how exasperated by this time the enemy were at being held up by a handful of a "contemptible little army." It was most difficult, too, to get any food up to the lines, for the German guns had "registered" all the approaches and persistently dropped their shells across them.

But the men hung on cheerily enough, and if they couldn't get any sleep they made up their minds that the Germans should not either, especially where they were dug in only a few hundred yards in front.

So the short summer night was passed. And with the first hint of dawn the news ran quickly round that, far from dreaming of retiring, the First Corps was going to attack. The news was as good as a big breakfast. Somehow or other the A.S.C. got up rations to most of the units, and so it was the cheeriest of 2nd Divisions which swung out of their trenches and loopholed houses and headed for the enemy's

left flank in Binche. The 1st Division acted as supports.

In the attack there was something more of a hint of that method and timing which, eight months later, were brought to such perfection in Flanders. The British batteries had by now recovered somewhat from their severe handling during the day, and at the given moment every gun got well to work in support of the infantry, and very fine practice they made.

Of course the attack was really no more than a ruse, daringly conceived and successfully executed. Binche could not have been held even if it had been recaptured. But it is not difficult to imagine the enemy's astonishment at finding an Army Corps, which they had fondly imagined as good as wiped out, coming to life again and actually having the cheek to attack them. Kipling's remark about the Fuzzy-wuzzy who is "generally shamming when 'e's dead" was an excellent motto for that morning's work.

When the attack was well launched General Lomax began to withdraw very carefully some of his regiments from the supporting 1st Division. The task of the British guns of the two divisions (working together) was to lower such a curtain of fire in front of the 2nd Division as to make it as difficult as possible

for the enemy to counter-attack or, indeed, to advance at all. As soon as the 1st Division have retired a little, it will be the turn of the division which has made that excellent sortie.

It is easy enough to say "the guns will check an enemy advance," but think for a moment what that means. There is already a big enemy superiority in guns, and, what is more, these have already got the ranges to a nicety.

Our batteries, or most of them, were in quite good positions, but at this early date we had not yet learned the art of concealing them sufficiently. The enemy aircraft were very active, and against them our own aircraft were hopelessly outnumbered. And so it was not long before our guns were "spotted," with the inevitable result.

Imagine, then, how gloriously those gun detachments must have worked to have accomplished what they did that day, "enabling Sir Douglas Haig, with the First Corps, to reach the new line without much further loss about 7 P.M." For it was undoubtedly the devotion of the guns which made possible this and succeeding retirements. Unless facts like this are realised, the astonishing work of the Force in its retreat can never be appreciated.

The Retreat Begins

The Second Corps

If that Monday was an anxious day for Sir Douglas Haig, what must it have been for General Smith-Dorrien and his men? One looks hopelessly at the blank writing-pad in despair of giving even the most primitive description of the anxiety, the work, and the accomplishment of it.

Here is a Corps which has gone through, for the first time, the awful ordeal of a day's modern shell-fire and massed infantry attack. The men have supped full of horrors, and, at 3 A.M., hungry, weary and with nerves stretched to their utmost tension, they have received orders to move. There is not a regiment which has not lost heavily, especially in officers, and there is not a man but receives the command with his senses tangled in bewilderment.

Now it should be remembered that up to this time all our dispositions had been made for an *advance*. The impedimenta to the rear of the firing-line were so arranged that they might the more easily follow up a British attack. There was no real thought of retiring. The British were in the place of honour on the left of the line, and intended, with our French comrades, to drive the enemy back again through Belgium.

I will not say that all this was a foregone conclusion, but at least it was "confidently anticipated." Remembering this, you will perhaps realise more vividly how staggering were the contents of that telegram from French G.H.Q.

The work, therefore, of clearing the roads of the transport was exceedingly difficult. This devolves upon the Q.M.G.'s department, and General Smith-Dorrien has placed on record the wholly admirable way in which it was accomplished by General Ryecroft and his Staff. But proper Staff work for all the retiring troops during the hours of darkness was even more complicated.

Thus some few of the companies, with no one to guide them, start off in the wrong direction and march straight into the German lines; they are shot or captured. Others wander off to the east, struggle painfully through the shell-fire on Mons, and drift into their comrade ranks of the First Corps. Others, again, march off to the west, and are hopelessly lost; they are either captured by the flanking German corps or they get through and meet with friendly peasants, to turn up eventually at base ports or other towns.

Night marching across unknown country is not always easy in peace time, with guides at

the heads of columns. Now there was the added confusion of the crowds of emigrants, a perfect network of roads to choose from, and, above all, continual alarms of enemy attacks which the British had to turn to meet. The whole of the night and all the Monday was one long period of marching, fighting, marching and fighting.

Early in the morning another infantry brigade, the 19th, arrived by railway, detraining at Valenciennes, and it is no exaggeration to say that the men went straight off the trains into the thick of the fight. It was a very welcome reinforcement of about 4,000 men.

By 8 A.M. the enemy had burst through Mons, across the canal line, and were in hot pursuit in overwhelming numbers. Away on the left flank they had attacked Tournai, which was occupied by French Territorials and also, I believe, by a British battery, though how it got there, or why, I do not know. That bit of fighting was over by midday with the capture of the town and the destruction or capture of its defenders. The Germans were then free to resume their victorious advance.

About the middle of the morning, then, the line of the Second Corps extended from a little

Belgian village called Frameries, five miles S.W. of Mons, through the village of Dour. The right flank was the more forward, partly because the regiments there had to encounter the more furious attacks and could not break away.

It was at this point that there was made one more of those splendid but hopeless cavalry charges of which we so often read in military history. It is, curiously enough, almost the only definite incident mentioned by Sir John French in his dispatch. But the incident, or rather the sequel to it, caught the public imagination, mainly because of the fine work of that most gallant gentleman, Francis Grenfell.

Of all the noble, lion-hearted men who have "gone west" in this bloody war, no man more worthily deserves the description applied to the Chevalier Bayard, "*sans peur et sans reproche*," than Francis Grenfell—he and one other whom I shall name hereafter. Gallant soldier, brilliant sportsman, graceful poet, and true lover of Nature, a genuine statesman in his dealings with men, and the most loyal of friends, he died later on the field of honour, and Britain—nay, the world is the poorer for his loss.

The charge was made by the 9th Lancers, which regiment, with others of the 2nd Brigade, had been moved forward to ease the pressure on the right flank.

About 400 yards from the German infantry and guns the Lancers galloped full tilt into barbed wire. There was nothing for it but to swerve across the German front. How a single man or horse escaped the hail of shell and bullets which was turned on them one can never understand. But a poor remnant, under Captain Francis Grenfell, did indeed get across, mercilessly pursued by that storm of lead, and eventually found some little shelter under a railway embankment.

A R.F.A. battery was in action here. At least, the guns were still there, but officers and detachments had been gradually wiped out until there were just one officer and two detachments left to work the battery. It was only a matter of minutes before the remainder must be killed and the guns fall into the hands of the enemy, for the German guns had the range and the German infantry were crowding up.

The 9th Lancers and the Gunners are old friends, and the Lancers do not leave old friends (or new ones) to finish a losing fight alone.

"The Germans don't get those guns while any of us are left," said Grenfell. "I'm off to see how we can get them away."

Now Grenfell was already badly wounded, but he stuck on his horse somehow and *walked* that gallant beast out into the storm to see where he was to run the guns to. (Why does not His Majesty create a decoration for horses? But I'll wager Grenfell hung his V.C. round his charger's neck a month later.)

Well, he walked him out and he walked him back, just to show his men what poor shots the Germans were.

"Now then," said Grenfell, "who's for the guns?"

And, since (as I have said) the Lancers always stand by old pals, every man of them was.

They tied their horses up, and Lancers and Gunners set to work. One by one of those guns they got at the wheels and trails and worked and worked. Down went more gallant Lancers and more gallant Gunners, but there were still a few left, and, by Heaven, those few stuck to it.

"Come on, lads, just one more!" sang out Grenfell, with his coat off.

And they worked and heaved, and did it. Every one of those guns they saved.

But then, be it repeated, the Lancers and Gunners always were good pals.

By midday General Smith-Dorrien's task had become one of the gravest difficulty. And this was but the opening phase of a movement which, I venture to think, will be accounted by the historian as one of the most astonishing pieces of work in military history. I refer not to the Retreat as a whole, but to the work of the Second Corps and its leader from 3 A.M. of the 24th to about midnight of the 26th—27th. An eternity of years was encircled by those few hours.

The difficulties of the movement can probably be appreciated at their full value only by the military student with a vivid imagination, so I will just suggest what had to be done. First of all, General Smith-Dorrien had to get his men away from the Mons line in the early dawn in the face of overwhelming numbers, numbers which he could only guess at, for at any moment a big attack might be made by another army upon his left flank. This was very much complicated by his men having been severely handled all through the Sunday, and getting no food nor rest. In fact, it was the *human* element which really made all the move-

ment so difficult. The feeling that at any moment the tremendous strain upon the men's endurance would stretch to breaking-point and snap.

Then the G.O.C. had not merely to get his men gradually back, but they had to show a bold front the whole time. It was a matter of fighting backwards without a moment's rest. A couple of regiments, say, with some cavalry, would halt for half an hour on a certain line, and hold up with the heaviest fire they could the attack on their particular section. Then, when the enemy got nearer, up they would jump and go straight at the Germans with the bayonet, the cavalry backing them up all they knew. The same with the guns.

A battery would manœuvre into a position, come into action, and pound away for a quarter of an hour. Then, at the right moment (and it called for the nicest judgment to select that moment) four guns would be run back, limbered up, and got away, while the remaining couple would continue an intermittent fire to cover the retirement. These in turn would slip away—if they could.

The casualties under conditions like these must, of course, be very heavy indeed. That they were not infinitely heavier was due to the

splendid use the men made of the ground, taking cover and so on, and to the noble spirit of self-sacrifice for comrades which animated every unit.

Thirdly, the G.O.C. had to remember that he was not playing a lone hand, but that he had to consider the retirement of the First Corps on his right. He had to play the match for his side. Just at the moment Jessop, in the person of Sir Douglas Haig, was in with him, and Jessop had to hit out against time to make the runs while Leveson-Gower (Smith-Dorrien) kept up his wicket at the other end.

And, fourthly, to carry on the metaphor, when Jessop was forced to "retire hurt" Leveson-Gower had to begin to hit at just that moment when he felt that he had "collared the bowling." In other words, the G.O.C., having held a certain line of defence for a couple of hours or so, had to judge to a nicety the exact moment when he had, for the time, broken the enemy's attack sufficiently to permit of retirement another two miles to the next position.

Those four points, then, constitute in very broad outline the task which General Smith-Dorrien had to perform. Our people have not

been slow to recognise how magnificently he and his men accomplished it.

The enemy were now, by accident or design, beginning to drive in a wedge at Frameries between the two corps. Always a serious situation, especially when, as now, units had become very scattered in the gradual retirement. The gap was filled to some extent by the 5th Brigade, which General Smith-Dorrien borrowed from the First Corps.

* * * * *

Impressions gleaned from the other side are always of interest. Another German officer, whom we got a few days later, gave me his opinion of the British work somewhat like this.

"All our text-books," he said, "about rear-guard actions will have to be rewritten, and you have certainly taught us a lesson. It has been just like advancing into a wall of fog. The fog is elastic enough when one enters it, but soon it clings all round and chokes you. We pushed in all right, but never came out at the other side."

Personally, I felt inclined to apply the metaphor the reverse way, and that is how the men felt it. The dense, overpowering cloud

rolling down, the battling against it with impotent arms, and the fog penetrating into every gap in the lines.

The men were dazed, stunned by the continuous onslaughts. There seemed no end to them. As fast as one German company was mown down another would spring up. It was as though their aircraft flew over with watchful eye to sow in every field another bushel of the mythical dragon's teeth. And everywhere more and more German guns would come into action to support their infantry, and everywhere more and more machine-guns would be rushed up by their very mobile transport to rake and enfilade the British companies or gun detachments.

At the time all these things were not realised, for there was no sitting down for five minutes to ruminate. But now, after eighteen months, when one pieces together this fact and that, and learns something of what the actual numbers were, one hesitates to set it down on paper for fear of being flatly disbelieved.

Any record of feelings during those hours is blurred. But there was one thought which, I know, was uppermost in every man's mind: "Where on earth are the French?"

When a thought like that has been born it

is easy to guess how it will grow and run through the ranks. If only now and again they had seen a French squadron swoop down upon the enemy's flank in front of them everything would have been well. They would have cheered their French comrades on, and gone in for all they were worth to avenge their death, if called upon. But never a French soldier did one of our lads see.

So far as I know, our Allies have published no official account of their retreat from Namur, although they have very frankly admitted, in an official Government report, the mistakes which were then made and have shown how they were since rectified. It is by no means clear what happened to the 5th French Army on our right after Namur had fallen; we only knew that *we* never saw them.

But at the time it must be remembered that no one in the British Force, save G.H.Q., knew what was happening even to themselves, so it was hardly likely that they could learn anything definite about the French. So there the subject may rest.

In the early afternoon General Smith-Dorrien learned that the First Corps had "made good" during the morning, and were

fighting their way back with sufficient success to admit of his own retirement when he was able to break away.

Although, perhaps, too little space has been given in this chapter to the work of the First Corps, they had nearly as hard a fight as the rest of the Force. The task before Sir Douglas Haig was probably not quite so delicate as General Smith-Dorrien's, but it was obviously one of as grave a responsibility. However, in the late afternoon he got safely back, as we have seen, to the position determined by the Commander-in-Chief.

The Second Corps then succeeded in breaking away, and by the evening a new line of the entire Force was formed, reaching from the fortress of Maubeuge on the right to two little villages, Bry and Jenlain, on the left. The 19th Brigade, which had come into the fight in the morning, was posted on and across the extreme left.

It should be noted that, with the fall of Tournai and the destruction of the French troops in that neighbourhood, the whole country on the west was open to the invaders. Their victorious army corps operating there was now able to swing round to attack the British left, and their cavalry was already

sweeping in flying squadrons and patrols over the country-side. In fact, the French Channel ports, from Boulogne to Havre, were there for the taking, and the French coast line, for which the enemy fought so valiantly a few months later, would have been theirs without a struggle.

But these facts were only vaguely realised in the Force, and the men, of course, knew nothing of doings save only upon their immediate front. At every moment they fully expected to make a definite stand, with an advance to follow, and thus they remained in good heart, secure in the conviction that though badly mauled they were not even at the beginning of a defeat. But some of us knew and realised, and it was a hard task to keep the knowledge from the men and from the friendly country-folk.

CHAPTER IX

THE SECOND DAY

Gloucester, 'tis true that we are in great danger;
The greater, therefore, should our courage be.—
. . . . God Almighty!
There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
Would men observingly distil it out.
For our bad neighbour makes us early stirrers,
Which is both healthful and good husbandry.

DURING the night of Monday the whole Force was on or about the line already indicated, with the fortress of Maubeuge on their right flank. But let it not be imagined that the men settled down quietly at 9 P.M. to a cosy supper with a night's sleep to follow. There was no such thing as a halt for any time. Incidentally, most of the horses went through the whole business without being off-saddled once. The first regiments in were the first to move off again. The men just dropped down in the road where they halted and, if lucky, snatched ten minutes' sleep. Many of the men seemed to sleep while they marched; although, as one has

often done it on night manœuvres at home, there was nothing curious about that.

By midnight I do not think that anybody very much cared what happened. There was a certain amount of trench digging going on, and there was, in consequence, some idea that a stand would be made. But the men were really too exhausted to care one way or the other.

It is all very well to remark upon their invariable cheeriness, as most writers seem to delight in doing, but it gives a hopelessly wrong impression of the hardships. A certain form of "cheery spirit" is inseparable from the British soldier when he is up against a tough job, but you can't very well be lively and make funny remarks (as reported in the Press) when you have become an automaton in all your movements.

Had the French held firm, in all probability a stand would have been made on this line. But there is no object in speculating about it now. The view adopted by the Commander-in-Chief, which determined a further retreat, may best be given in his own words:

"The French were still retiring, and I had no support except such as was afforded by the fortress of Maubeuge; and the determined attempts of the enemy to get round my left

flank assured me that it was his intention to hem me against that place and surround me. I felt that not a moment must be lost in retiring to another position."

"I hoped," he adds, "that the enemy's pursuit would not be too vigorous to prevent me effecting my object."

This hope was, fortunately, fulfilled, and the second day's retirement was, on the whole, less eventful. Later I will hazard a suggestion why it was so.

The necessary orders had been given overnight to be clear of the Valenciennes—Bavai—Maubeuge road by 5.30 A.M. The Second Corps got clear by the time specified, but the First Corps could only begin their move at that hour, and so got behind. This fact tended to make inevitable the fight which took place that evening at Landrecies.

It was, as I remember, a baking hot day, with a blazing sun in a cloudless sky. Along English country roads and through our own little dappled-grey villages it would have been trying enough; but French roads, built Roman fashion, do not try to be picturesque and charming, and they certainly have no sense of humour like ours. Thus, the day's march was simply purgatory to a tired force. The fruit

trees with their harvest really saved the situation. But, oh, those green apples and pears!

Once again, do not imagine the regiments trekking along straight for their next destination. The day was less eventful only in comparison with Monday and Wednesday. It was a rear-guard action most of the way, and there was quite enough fighting to break the monotony, with some big cavalry actions and the 5th Brigade heavily engaged.

Take, for instance, a field battery in the 2nd Division. The time-table would be something like this: 5.30 A.M., open fire; 6, cease fire and limber up; 6.10, en route to new position; 6.30, halt, open fire; 6.40, cease fire, limber up, and start off for new position; 7.15, halt, open fire; and so on all through the day. In fact, that was the ordinary day's programme.

The particular battery I have in mind had a little adventure all to itself on Tuesday. It is of interest as revealing another side of German thoroughness.

The battery was in action, but had temporarily ceased firing, and the detachments were lying by the guns.

A big grey "Sunbeam" drew up on a road to the flank of the battery, and a couple of red-tabbed Staff officers jumped out, walked up to

the nearest gun, and started to chat with one of the gunners.

After a few remarks about how well the battery had been doing, they asked some questions about casualties, positions of neighbouring batteries, the infantry near them, and the usual facts which the Staff come to inquire about.

The major had been watching from the far flank, and, as the Staff officers turned to get into their car, he remarked to the sergeant-major :

"I don't quite like the look of those two officers; there's something wrong about them." And he had a look through his glasses.

Some distance along the road there was marching down a company of R.E.'s.

"Call up those sappers (by flag) and tell them to hold up that car."

The sergeant-major repeated the message to the flag-wagger.

"Stop grey car—suspicious."

The R.E. sergeant ran up to the subaltern in charge :

"Battery signals 'stop grey car.'"

"Well, stop it, then," replied the subaltern irritably.

So the grey car was stopped, very much to

the annoyance of two Staff officers who were in a great hurry to get back to G.H.Q.

"Very sorry, sir," said the subaltern, "but it's a telegraph message from that battery. The O.C. has probably got something special to send to G.H.Q." And the car was escorted back again.

The O.C. had "something special to send" in the shape of a couple of German officers, very carefully disguised as British. A drumhead court-martial was held at Corps H.Q., and as the Germans in question were hopelessly compromised by the very full notes which they had managed to collect from various units about the Force, the case was clear.

"Guilty. To be shot at dawn."

They were plucky fellows, but—well, a spy is a spy, and that's all about it.

Less than a week before the country folk had watched with delight and relief the passing of mighty transport columns of British, had welcomed and cheered the men forward, proud and confident in the anticipation of early victory.

Now imagine their feelings, their alarm, at the sight of British regiments, war-worn, weary and battered, trailing back as fast as they could move.

Of what use was it to tell them that this was only a strategical retirement? Panic spreads quickly, and once the hint of calamity is given it is impossible to check the alarm.

But even then it was some little time before the stolid peasants of Northern France could grasp the meaning of what they saw, and I remember well how the inhabitants of a certain little village crowded out to watch the extraordinary (to them) behaviour of a regiment which was in the extreme rear of the retiring First Corps.

The village overlooked a valley, and there was a splendid view of the British lines retiring in open order up the hill towards the little hamlet. They came up panting heavily and, just under the brow of the hill, set to work to dig up some rough shelter. The folk stood watching, laughing and talking, until an exasperated lance-corporal threw his tool in front of an oldish man.

"'Ere, it's about b—— well time *you* did a bit"; and the corporal sat down to wipe off some of the dirt from his face.

In a few minutes all the men and women had started digging as though for buried treasure, and the British sat still for a spell and encouraged them with happy comments.

Very soon down the opposite slope thousands of little grey-blue ants came swiftly, and from the ridge behind them dim flashes shot out.

"Now, then, you'd better 'op it!" said the lance-corporal.

And even then they didn't understand what those ants really were.

"Allmonds!" was the lance-corporal's laconic remark.

The arrival of a shell settled it, and the villagers ran helter-skelter for their houses and little treasures. In a quarter of an hour another pitiable reinforcement had joined the ranks of the refugee army flying southwards, and only the old curé remained, ever true to his charge. They were gallant gentlemen those French curés, and bravely they faced the death which nearly always overtook them at the hands of those murderers.

It was not until the British had turned to advance from the Marne that they began fully to realise the nature of the Germans. As yet they encountered no evidence of the atrocious, bestial work of the enemy. But already rumour was busy, and even on this day I had recorded authentic details that the Germans were placing women and children before their advancing in-

fantry, and that they were stabbing the wounded with the bayonet.

On the Sunday another British Division, the 4th, had arrived at Le Cateau, the little town to which the Force was now moving. This meant a reinforcement of some 14,500 men, together with three field batteries. They were there waiting to come into action on the Wednesday, and in the meantime had begun to entrench.

The general line of retirement on the Tuesday was:

(*a*) First Corps, Bavai—Maubeuge, to Landrecies—Maroilles.

(*b*) Second Corps, Bry—Bavai, to west of Le Cateau.

A glance at the picture-map will show the position of these places. It will be noted that the various divisions kept together pretty well. Also that between Landrecies and Le Cateau there was a gap in the line which the 6th Brigade could not properly fill. The Commander-in-Chief remarks in his dispatch that the men in the First Corps were too exhausted to march farther so as to cover this gap.

You picture, then, the regiments arriving one by one at the end of that most exhausting

day. The men dog-tired, hardly able to drag their feet over the burning ground, no proper meal since a hasty breakfast at dawn, fighting on and off all day, and now simply done to the world.

Now, it is a golden rule in the Service that, however tired the men may be, they *must* set to work at the end of their march to entrench themselves or otherwise prepare against possible attack. I leave it to your imagination to realise the meaning of "discipline" when you learn that the men did entrench themselves that evening. And never was that rule more finely vindicated.

I conceive Marshal von Kluck at German G.H.Q. soliloquising that Tuesday morning something in this wise:

"My friends von Buelow and Hausen have between them settled with the French on this side, and *they* won't give any more trouble. Von Buelow and I have pretty well pounded and demoralised the English, and one more effort should finish *them*. Now, I will just give them enough to keep them busy through to-day, keep them on the run and exhaust them thoroughly, and then to-night we'll have a really hot attack and crumple up the First Corps. They'll never stand that; and

we shall then have the rest of their army surrounded."

And that is the suggestion about the day's work which I venture to make. We have seen how the daylight hours went for the British, and how the Force drifted in to their destinations. Now we will see how von Kluck crumpled up the First Corps with his night attack.

The 1st Division was halted in and about Maroilles, and the 2nd Division at Landrecies. They were therefore on the extreme right of the line, with their flank more or less "in the air," for no French seemed to be near. Landrecies was held by the 4th Brigade, battalions of the Foot Guards, Grenadiers, Coldstreams and Irish, under General Scott-Kerr.

The torrid heat of the day had been the prelude to a cool, rainy evening. Room was found for about two-thirds of the Brigade in the houses and halls of the little town—a typical French country-town, with its straight streets and market-place. The remainder of the men got what little comfort they could on a rainy night outside.

By 9 P.M. they had hardly begun to settle down, after "clearing decks for action"—in case. Outposts had been placed, and the men

were congratulating themselves on a comfortable shelter after so many nights of foot slogging. At 9.30 lights were out, and town and country-side were in pitch darkness.

A battalion of the Coldstream Guards had not yet arrived, but was about a quarter of a mile from the town, marching in. The colonel was at the head of the column with the guide. This man persisted in flashing an electric torch to and fro towards the left, and the C.O. peremptorily ordered him to put it out.

The man obeyed for a few yards, and then flashed the light again.

The C.O. at once grasped the situation, drew his revolver, and shot the spy dead.

It was as though that bullet had been fired straight into a mountain of gunpowder.

With a terrific crash German guns opened fire. Simultaneously, on front and flank, rifles and machine-guns blazed out.

A German night attack is no question of feeling a way in open order until the enemy's outposts are driven in; it comes down like a smith's hammer on the anvil.

The Coldstreamers, with miraculous discipline, swung round and got into a kind of line with the outposts already there, then continued retirement to the town at the double.

The outpost line was crushed through almost in a moment like tissue paper, and before anyone could grasp what was happening the Germans were pouring their massed columns into the town.

Thus began perhaps the most critical and certainly the most remarkable fight in which British regiments have ever been engaged.

Tired out, the men tumbled out of the houses; three privates and a corporal here, a dozen men and a sergeant there, a subaltern, a private and a machine-gun at another corner, half a dozen men at two first-floor windows somewhere else. And the only light came from the flash of the rifles.

There was no idea of forming ranks, even had it been possible. Slowly, steadily up the streets the great German mammoth crept, and, like tigers at their prey, the men of the Guards sprang at head and flanks, worrying with grim-set teeth to the heart of the beast.

Now the British machine-guns opened fire straight upon the head of the column, swept it away, swept the succeeding ranks, until the mass was brought to a standstill.

More Guardsmen threw themselves straight at the ranks, firing as they could, crashing in with bayonet and clubbed rifle.

Now the column shivers; but the Germans are brave men. They rally, for their comrades are pouring into the town to help them. Up side streets and lanes, by all the approaches they come, and everywhere the men of the Guards spring at them.

But surely numbers must tell. What can four battered regiments, fighting by handfuls, do in face of such thousands of a fresh army corps!

From Maroilles right down the line the British are fighting for their lives, for von Kluck has staked heavily on this throw, and it would seem that the dice are loaded. He pushes his guns up still closer until some are firing into the town almost at point-blank range. Again, what does it matter if his own men are swept away? There are thousands more to fill their places.

The houses have begun to blaze fiercely in the torrents of rain, and there is plenty of light at last. And now the Guards rally for a supreme effort. The last, the forlorn hope—but it is the Guards, and at least they will go down fighting to the last man.

One mighty heave—in at them—again—they are breaking—heave!

They have done it. Broken them. Driven

them out. And behind them the enemy leave close upon 1,000 dead.

Away up by Maroilles Sir Douglas Haig has fought his men like one possessed, and there, too, he has broken the German attack, just as two French Reserve Divisions came up to his aid.

Slowly, sullenly, von Kluck withdraws his legions. Slowly and fitfully the firing dies away, and by 2 A.M. all is still once more.

CHAPTER X

AN INTERLUDE

. . . As many ways meet in one town;
As many fresh streams meet in one salt sea;
As many lines close in the dial's centre;
So may a thousand actions, once afoot,
End in one purpose, and be all well borne
Without defeat.

THERE is something more than magic in the poetry of Shakespeare's *Henry V.* when it is read to illustrate the stirring events of these opening phases of the War. To set it side by side with the recital of the story is to listen to the voice of a singer supported by the gravely-sounding, deep-toned brass instruments of an orchestra.

There is more than beauty of accompaniment, there is the magic of prophecy. I can hardly find an incident of those August days which was not mirrored three centuries ago in the verse of this play. Thus, I have sought in no other for the musical preludes of my chapters; and I confess often to have rubbed

my eyes in astonishment at the aptness of the poetry to the incidents of the moment.

Now those few bars of introduction suggest another *motif;* let me try to expand the theme a little.

In reading the cold, semi-official language which states that the British Force halted at such and such an hour along a line extending from So-and-So to Somewhere, one is apt to gain an impression which is far removed from reality.

You picture, perhaps, the various units retiring along routes carefully assigned by gilded Staff officers, and duly arriving at the scheduled times in various villages and hamlets. That there they are met by courteous billeting parties, who proceed to allot the men to more or less unwilling householders. That at the hour specified in the report you find the Dorsets in one place, the Irish Guards next to them, the batteries with their guns neatly parked, and so on all down the line. The various H.Q.'s of Brigades, Divisions or Corps all in readily accessible spots, and everybody connected up with everybody else by telegraph or telephone, so that any unit can be set in motion at any minute.

That is the ideal. Well, that delightful

ideal first assumed definite shape after the Battle of the Marne and not before. Here is a little sketch of a tiny village on the line of retreat on the evening of Tuesday, August 25th:

M. le maire, old Pierre Godolphin, sat slowly pulling at a new clay pipe as he looked with unseeing eyes up the long dusty road which led out of the village away over the northern uplands. A trimly kept hedge of privet bordered his rose-garden and the road, and his favourite seat was set in a little niche of the greenery whence he could command all that went on in his tiny kingdom and, without moving, could see exactly what Madame la Femme du Maire was about in the stone-flagged kitchen.

That afternoon an avalanche of three-ton motor lorries had descended upon the village, weird vehicles which announced in blatant language the superiority over all others of Mayflower's margarine or the outstanding merits of Pulltite's corsets. The men in authority were obviously, from their uniforms, English officers, and not travellers for the firms in question. But, frankly, old Pierre was puzzled. They had come from the south, and why did they not continue their journey? Two of the officers

were actually proposing to stay with him, for an indefinite period.

M. le boulanger walked slowly across the road to confer with him about the baking of more bread. "But these English are like a locust swarm, and I have no more flour," he explained.

"A glass of cider for monsieur, Henriette."

"I do not understand," Pierre went on, "what it is ces braves garçons do here. It is the third week of war, and by now surely ces bêtes de Boches should have been driven back into their own pigsties—— Mais, nom de Dieu, qu'est ce que c'est?"

Down the village street a four-seater car came lurching from side to side like a drunken man. Crash! It has caught a stone post and turned over. In an instant the road is full of people running.

Two men lay dazed as they had been thrown out. Both in the yellow-green uniform of the British, one, certainly, an officer. Willing hands lift them tenderly, and someone dashes a jug of water over their heads. Then one sees what has happened.

Between the shoulders on the officer's tunic there is spreading a great dark stain. Very carefully they take off the coat and shirt and

try to stanch the blood. But it is too late; there is a bullet through the lungs, and, with a little gasp, the officer lies still.

In a few minutes the other man recovers sufficiently to tell how they were taking a dispatch through to the rear. The officer was driving the car when they ran straight into a patrol of enemy cavalry. They had got through, but the enemy opened fire, and now his officer lies dead. Things are going badly up there—and the man vaguely indicates the country up north: our men are retiring as hard as they can; whole regiments are getting wiped out; and "Gawd knows where the French are." Can he get a motor-bike to take on the message?

An A.S.C. officer runs for his car, the man is put in, and off they start again.

Only the A.S.C. lorry drivers understood the story, but the villagers were quick to realise that something serious was happening. Old Pierre remembered 1870, and he knew what war meant; but to the rest it was a new, hideous thing, dimly realised, but now, at last, with this mute witness before them, very real.

Then things began to happen. No one ever knows how a crowd will spring up in a city street, apparently by magic, and here suddenly the village began to fill with men.

An Interlude

Four soldiers—two Scots, a Dorset and a Bedford man—black with grime, three days' growth of beard, hollow-eyed and limping painfully, appeared in front of Pierre and asked where they were to go. A captain of the Guards, riding a tired farm-horse, with a colonel walking by his side, one hand on the horse's flank, came behind, and, tackling the A.S.C. captain, asked for something to eat.

"We've been on the trudge for twelve hours," said the colonel, "and could get nothing. No one knows where anyone is. The regiment? Badly cut up last night and all scattered, heaven knows where."

"Is the mayor about anywhere?" And a young Staff officer, with a French interpreter, pushes his way through the crowd.

"A cavalry brigade (or what's left of it"—he adds in an undertone) "will be here tonight. What barns and houses have you available? How much hay can you get?"

Old Pierre is beginning to lose his wits in the amazing turn of events.

"If monsieur will come into the house I will try to arrange."

The officer follows, with a shrug of the shoulders which might have meant many things.

The long summer's day is closing, but there

is no hint of the evening's cool in the heavy air. All over the little village green, where the church tower has thrown a grateful shadow, lie groups of men worn with exhaustion and sleeping with gulping breaths. In one corner Henriette is busy with water and clean linen, bathing and bandaging horrible, staring wounds. And the men lie patiently, with now and then a moan of pain, gazing up at her with the great round eyes of a hurt collie dog.

And now the vanguard of the retiring army begins to stream in and through—all arms, all regiments. Overhead a flight of aeroplanes circle, like homing pigeons, seeking where they may alight. It is incredible that these are the regiments which a little ten days ago swung gaily down the Aldershot roads.

At the head of the column there marches a field battery. Two days ago the major took it into action six guns and wagons strong, with perhaps a couple of hundred men; so proud in his command, his men, his horses.

Now, stand by the path and watch the battery pass! And, as it passes, uncover your head, for it has returned from the very gates of Death.

Two guns—with three horses each to draw them. There are still four drivers left, and

there are still half a dozen gunners. On the first limber ride a subaltern and the sergeant-major, and by the gun walk another sergeant and the quartermaster-sergeant. That is the battery.

On the second limber three men sit, swaying dizzily. A captain of a cavalry regiment and two privates of a Scottish regiment.

Here marches a battalion of the Guards. Two days ago it went into action perhaps 1,100 strong. Uncover your head once again as it passes, for these men too have looked Death in the face.

At the head there paces slowly an ammunition mule. On it, wearing a peasant's slouch hat, with breeches cut off above the knees, and with left arm held close by a rough bandage, there rides the colonel. Count the men as they march past in fours: 80, 120, 160, 180, 220. No, that is the next regiment you are counting in. Just 200! That is the tale of them.

Blackened by dust and powder, bearded, breeches cut short like those of their commanding officer, the few puttees that are left to them wrapped round their feet for boots—otherwise bits of sacking or cloth, bloody bandages round heads or arms, some with hats like the colonel's, most with none at all slowly they

limp by. And, as they pass, the A.S.C. drivers silently offer such biscuits or bread as they have. God, how they wolf the food!

The colonel turns round on his "charger," and in a hoarse shout:

"Battalion! 'Tention! Pull yourselves together, lads; a French village!"

Ah, the pride of them! The glory of race and blood! This is not the Mons country, with its blood-soaked memories; 'tis the Horse Guards Parade, and we're Trooping the Colour!

The click of rifles coming to the slope runs down the ranks. The fours line by magic as the men straighten themselves; it is a new regiment, marching into action, which the French villagers see pass before them.

"Defeat? Why, this is part of the joke! Just to draw the Germans on into the trap." And at a word they would have turned to charge an army corps.

And so the regiments pass. And as the last of the Division goes through, lights twinkle from the tiny windows of the cottages and the great yellow moon climbs slowly over the poplar trees. An A.S.C. sergeant mounts a lorry with a copy of the Paris *Daily Mail* in his hand, and entertains an ever-growing audience with the

news that the Russians have invaded Germany and are marching on Berlin.

"It will be all over by Christmas—but I'd 'ave liked just one slap at them Germans, so as I could tell the missis," says a late bus-driver.

But on the outskirts of the crowd the Staff officer is talking to the A.S.C. captain:

"I've no orders for you, but you've evidently been forgotten. You ought to have had your park fifteen miles farther south by now. Things are bad, and there will be the hell of a scrap round here to-morrow morning. I should clear out if I were you."

Away up to the north there is a blinding electric glare coming fast down the road. Nearer, and it is the headlight on the first of a long train of R.F.C. light motor-lorries, slipping silently down on rubber tires. The dust rises in clouds above and about them. Halfway through the village a motor-cyclist rides, meeting them. The dust takes his shadow, and as he approaches the headlight the silhouette rises higher and higher until it mounts to the sky and disappears. Just as when children play a shadow pantomime and vanish by jumping over the lamp.

The lorries pass, and the dust slowly settles

once more. The little lights twinkle clearly again, and the moon now floods the countryside in a sheen of silver.

But the A.S.C. captain talks earnestly with his sergeant-major and M. le maire.

"We must move, but how can we possibly carry all those wounded and stragglers?"

M. le maire is of opinion that as *les Boches* are being driven back into Germany, the wounded might well remain until ambulances can be got.

The O.C. looks at his sergeant-major. They have both guessed the meaning of that retirement, and they guess also something that they dare not tell the mayor.

A few minutes suffice to rouse all the men and to get the wounded made as comfortable as possible in the lorries. Lights are switched on the cars, and within half an hour the column is clear of the village on its way south.

An hour later the advance patrols of a German cavalry division ride in from the north; and old Pierre finds that the hay he had collected for *les anglais* does not go very far with his new visitors.

Poor old Pierre, and Madame the mayoress, and the pretty little rose-garden!

Such is a little pen-picture, not one whit exaggerated, of an evening of the Retreat. And perhaps those few lines will serve to convey some trifling idea of the wonder of the achievement.

Everywhere regiments and units forgotten, or lost, or acting on their own initiative. And yet, somehow or other, making a composite whole to turn and repel the attacking hordes. Staff work practically ceased to exist, and yet the threads of communication held fast, though only by a little.

Now you have had a glimpse of the men who, the very next day, fought *and won* perhaps the most glorious fight a British Army has ever shared in.

> So may a thousand actions, once afoot,
> End in one purpose, and be all well borne
> Without defeat.

CHAPTER XI

WEDNESDAY, THE 26TH OF AUGUST

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.

WESTMORELAND. *Of fighting men they have full three-score thousand.*
EXETER. *There's five to one; besides, they all are fresh.*
SALISBURY. *God's arm strike with us! 'tis a fearful odds.*

THE night attack which the First Corps had so magnificently repulsed was but the prelude to the greater attack of August 26th. So imminent did the danger appear to the Commander-in-Chief, so tense was the anxiety, that immediately after the firing had died away at midnight orders were issued to the First Corps to march again at daybreak. I cannot attempt to dwell upon the condition of the men after the battle of Sunday, the fighting and marching of Monday and Tuesday, and, finally, the great fight of Tuesday night. One can but quote the words of Sir John French: "They were too exhausted to be placed in the fighting line," and "were at the moment incapable

of movement," and so leave the rest to the imagination.

To that extent, then, had von Kluck succeeded in his scheme. The First Corps were temporarily out of action; the French, as the Commander-in-Chief remarks, "were unable to afford any support on the most critical day of all"; and to the Second Corps was left the task of withstanding the whole German attack, designed to outflank them on the left and roll them up. And the odds against them were, as at Agincourt, "five to one"; in guns, more than six to one.

Apart from his 3rd and 5th Divisions, General Smith-Dorrien had taken under his command the detached 19th Infantry Brigade (composed of the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 1st Scottish Rifles, 1st Middlesex, 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders), the infantry and some of the R.F.A. of the 4th Division, and two brigades of cavalry, out by Cambrai.

The line of the Second Corps on the Tuesday night extended, roughly, from Le Cateau on the east to a little south of Cambrai on the west, or a front of about fifteen miles. Trenches had been hastily dug since the previous afternoon. East of Le Cateau was a big gap between the two Corps. This could not be bridged

owing to the exhausted condition of the regiments in the 2nd Division.

Some hours before battle was joined General Smith-Dorrien realised that it was absolutely impossible for him to carry out the Commander-in-Chief's instructions and continue his retirement in conjunction with the First Corps. A retirement in face of such overwhelming numbers would have meant annihilation. At 2 A.M. he decided to fight, and reported so to his Chief. Sir John French replied that the retirement must continue.

"My only chance," rejoined the General, "is to do my utmost in weakening the enemy's attack, and then seize such a moment as I can to retire."

General Smith-Dorrien was on the field of action; Sir John French was at G.H.Q., some twenty miles to the south. The man on the spot, realising that the only hope of stopping the enemy lay in a successful action, proceeded with his plans of battle. The fight began at daylight.

About 7 A.M. General Smith-Dorrien informed G.H.Q. by telephone that the battle was in progress, and that he was confident that he could deal the enemy a smashing blow sufficiently heavy to gain time to withdraw his weary troops.

Wednesday, the 26th of August

"General," said the senior Staff officer over the telephone, "yours is the cheeriest voice I've heard for three days. I'll go and tell the Chief."

The Commander-in-Chief, who did not approve of the decision to fight, in reply instructed him "to use his utmost endeavours to break off the action and retire at the earliest possible moment."

Le Cateau, after which this battle has come to be named, is a pleasant enough little town set in a country-side not unlike the Sussex uplands between Tonbridge and Hastings—broad, open pasture- and meadow-land, cut by tiny valleys, rolling away south to the dip of St. Quentin. Through the town runs one broad street, and here, in the town hall offices, G.H.Q. had its habitation for a short spell earlier in the week. Opposite there was a little bun-shop and café combined, which proudly announced: "English five o'clock tea." The two buxom ladies who dispensed the refreshing beverage must have overheard many a little confidence exchanged between their unsuspecting officer clients, and we heard later that one of the two had been shot as a German spy.

With the earliest dawn the firing began

along the front with such a curious spitefulness (if one could so call it) that many of our men afterwards remarked about it. There were evidently to be no half measures about this attack, for the German infantry came on almost with the first rounds from their guns, advancing in their usual masses and making big play with their machine-guns. It was good country for this kind of work, while the cover our men got was generally only such as they could make for themselves by digging.

The morning came on radiantly sunny, with the sky a lovely pale limpid blue, washed clear by the downpour of the previous night.

"An' 'tis a foine morning they'll be having in Lismore for the fair this day," remarked a lad from County Cork; "but I would not be missin' the fair *we'll* be having for all the porter in Daddy Breean's ould tent. Ah, will ye look at that now! Shure, 'tis the bhoys are coming early for the knocks they'll be getting. Will I be seeing how the little gun is shooting this morning, yer honour?"

The platoon commander nodded, for Jerry was a privileged favourite. He was also a remarkably fine shot.

So Jerry nestled his cheek cosily down to his little gun and took a deep breath, while the

two or three near him looked on with interest. Jerry lifted his head again, for he was an artist and knew the value of arousing expectation.

"And will it be a golden sovereign if I take the coat-tails of the little ould gentleman with the spy-glasses?" This was Jerry's way of making a bet.

"Yes; I'll bet you a sovereign you won't down that officer on the right, and he looks like the colonel," said the platoon commander. It was a 500 yards' shot, and hazy, too.

Jerry carefully judged the distance by a half-way haystack, adjusted his sight, and settled down once again. "For the ould counthry!" he breathed, and slowly squeezed the trigger.

The "little ould gentleman" was seen to clap his hand smartly to his leg, while two men ran up to him.

"Will ye double the stakes, yer honour, for me to take the three o' them?" said Jerry over his shoulder, clicking his bolt back and forward again.

"A fiver, Jerry, if you do it."

Jerry wedged his rifle between two stones, took a slightly fuller sight, and almost before you could have counted them three shots cracked out.

"Have you that fiver on you, yer honour,

or will I be taking an I O U?" And Jerry leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction as a mighty cheer ran down the trench, and the platoon officer shook him hard by the hand. What the enemy thought about it one could only surmise, but a few of the men shook their fists threateningly in the direction of the British lines.

Now let us follow for a little the fortunes of a Brigade in a particularly warm corner of the line close to a small town where a very strong German attack soon developed. The guns of the Brigade opened fire at daybreak. They had managed to dig some serviceable pits, and were as snugly ensconced as time had allowed.

For an hour, perhaps, the German guns pounded steadily away without making very much impression; and our R.F.A. as steadily replied. Many of the outlying farms and houses were badly knocked about and began to burn fiercely. About 7.30 the enemy made a determined attempt to get hold of a flank position for their machine-guns to enfilade our infantry; and it was then that one regiment lost horribly before our cavalry could get round in a counter-attack. So heavy were

Photograph Central News, Ltd.

GENERAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG.

their casualties that, as a regiment, they were simply out of action, and an urgent message was dispatched to the next Brigade for anything they could possibly send in the way of reinforcements. Badly off though they were, two battalions were promptly transferred. Just one more instance of working shoulder to shoulder.

It was curious how certain regiments suffered very heavily while other units next to them got off comparatively lightly. One R.F.A. brigade, for instance, was right in the thick of the fighting from Mons to the Aisne, and yet had very few losses until the middle of September, while the battery next on their left on this Wednesday suffered very badly. Of two other batteries I came across, one was in action right through to the Aisne, and did not have a single casualty, while a second (most curious of all), in the First Corps, never fired a shot until the big advance of the Corps at the Aisne on September 14th.

About 9 A.M. things began to look serious. Several enemy infantry attacks had been met by desperate counter-charges; but numbers were bound to tell. A German cavalry regiment had succeeded in working round to the flank, and now they made a gallant effort to capture the British guns.

This was, I believe, one of the very few occasions when the enemy cavalry had a real chance of getting any of our batteries by a charge. There was a clear field, and they had got to within 500 yards of the battery, when the guns opened on them. Our men had heard about the fatal charge of the 9th Lancers, and now it was their turn. The battery commander dropped to "fuse o, open sights," and the detachments worked as though the devil were behind them. In the next 250 yards the cavalry lost a good two-thirds of the regiment, and they got no nearer than 200 yards from the guns. A British squadron luckily came out at the moment, and charged clean through the remnant, wheeled, and cut up what still remained. And that was the end of that very game attack.

If only the Germans would always play fair, there would be nothing to grumble about. Their infantry cannot, of course, be compared with the British, and our cavalry have always come out better than theirs in a clean fight; but the Germans have always fought courageously when it was a case of genuine fighting. Indeed, it is a very poor compliment to our men to suggest otherwise.

But the main attack, instead of being

checked, seemed to gather strength, until it became manifestly impossible to protect and hold the little town any longer. The infantry accordingly gradually withdrew under cover of the guns, and at last the guns were limbered up and marched back to another position farther south, the Brigade having held the corner for something like four hours.

Most of the townsfolk had begun their flight late on the previous evening, but a good many still remained. Had they only known the fate in store for them, the invaders would have found an empty town. But, at least in this case, vengeance was swift, as you shall hear.

The Brigade, then, took up its new position, and the men were able to make themselves fairly snug before the enemy had finished with the town. Fortunately, too, many of our wounded were got away from the hospital, for the Germans had begun to shell that some time before. But it was a very trying business, as there were not enough ambulances for the very large number of casualties, and many had to be carried on the already overloaded regimental transport.

Now, it must be remembered that General Smith-Dorrien had absolutely no reserves on

which to draw if any part of his line began to bend back. The usual plan is, of course, to keep certain fresh regiments concentrated at given spots to move up in support as and when required. But now, if the Inniskillings were getting badly cut up and a gap was being made, the G.O.C. could only call upon the Cheshires, say, a mile off, who were not being so strongly attacked, to send a company or so to the help of their comrades.

Another thing. I have hinted in a previous chapter that the threads of communication with the ammunition supply were badly stretched to breaking-point, owing to the astonishing speed at which the British had to retire. Normally, the ammunition parks (motor transport) draw the ammunition supplies from railhead, and carry it up to the divisional ammunition columns. These, in turn, distribute to brigade columns, and the actual units draw upon the last named. Thus there are several links between railhead and the firing-line, and the motor-lorries should not come within about eight miles of the line.

But on this Wednesday and the two or three following days all this arrangement literally went to pieces. How could it be otherwise? And that is how the A.S.C. drivers came to

do their bit with all the rest. Speed was vital, and the lorries could cover the distance in a third of the time taken by the horse transport. In fact, the horse transport was ignored or forgotten, although there were exceptions. One saw the divisional columns aimlessly trekking about the country, at one moment under orders to go to a certain village, only to find on arrival that the enemy were just a mile off; back they would come again as hard as the tired horses could do it.

Time and again an urgent message would go back from a battery for more 18-pr. or howitzer, and the dispatch-rider would have instructions to get the stuff wherever he could lay hands on it. He generally managed to find a few lorries of a "park," and so off the bus drivers would start with their three-ton vehicles, little dreaming that they were going under fire.

"Gor blimey, sir," said one of them next day to his officer, "I tell yer it wos a fair beano! We'd gone abaht a couple o' miles, when the sergeant wot wos along o' me on the box 'e sez: 'Stevens,' sez 'e, 'can yer knock anything more aht of 'er? 'Cos they're firing acrost the road.' Lor lumme, I nearly put 'er in the ditch at the turn 'e giv me! Yer see,

sir, I didn't enlist to get knocked aht by no b—— German. I'm a peaceable man, I am, wot likes my grub and pint o' bitter reg'lar like, and the missus the same. But, as I wos a-sayin', I turned to the sergeant an' I sez: 'Yer don't fink there's no danger, do yer?' An' the sergeant, 'e sez, sarkastic-like: 'Ho no, they're only bustin' the shells on the road, an' we've got a few tons of fireworks be'ind wot's bahnd to bust too if we gits 'it!' S'welp me pink, sir, I turned that cold you could 'ave 'eard my teeth going louder nor the enjin.

"'E 'adn't 'ardly spoke when there was the 'ell of a bang somewheres just be'ind, and—well, you can bet your life, sir, we did a guy for all we wos worth. Lord, 'ow we 'opped it dahn that road! I tell yer, sir, we knocked forty-five miles an hour aht o' that ole bus, and she come up to it like as we wos knockin' spots orf of a pirit bus dahn Piccadilly.

"The sergeant, 'e jammed 'is 'eel dahn on the accelerator, an' I just 'eld on to the wheel wiv bofe 'ands. It wos a fair old Brock's benifit we wos in. But we got frew orl right, and wen we got to the place where we wos to drop the stuff, there weren't no guns wot wanted it. An', as old G. R. Sims sez, 'hit wos the unkindest cut of orl.' Well, I wasn't

coming back agin frew that pyrriteknikle show not for the ole bus full o' suvrins, an' so we come 'ome rahnd by a place I forgit the name of, and that's 'ow we're late; but it was worf the hextra thirty miles rahnd, an' I 'ope, sir, yer won't mind this time."

There was another occasion on this day when three of these lorries went forward under the charge of an officer. He was quite unaware that the village whence the call for howitzer shell had come had been captured by the Germans half an hour after the message had been sent. On the way he picked up another officer who was lost.

Rounding a corner by a wood, about a mile from the village, they came straight upon a small German cavalry outpost. The Germans sprang to their feet at the rumble of the approaching lorries, and a sergeant stood in the road to bar the way.

There was not a moment for thought, and the second officer whipped his pistol out and took a snap shot. Luckily, he killed the sergeant outright. The officer in charge jumped down into the road as the lorry pulled up, with his own revolver in hand, and levelled it at the group by the roadside. One of them got his carbine off from the hip, and the shot just

missed the first lorry driver on his seat. The officer promptly sent a bullet through the man's chest. Over his shoulder he shouted to the drivers to reverse the lorries, while he and the other officer held up the Germans.

Now, reversing three big lorries in not too wide a road needs some doing; but they all backed and advanced and sidled and backed until it was done. Then one officer jumped up behind the last one, the second officer followed, and off the lorries went.

There was nothing remarkable about the little experience, and it is only recorded to show the difficulties in ammunition supply at this time and also how the A.S.C. drivers were doing their job.

You must imagine that while we have been at the rear with the A.S.C., the fighting all along the British line has been growing in intensity. A big flank attack, with the idea of rolling up the whole line like a ball of string, is always a favourite move of the Germans, and this time they were trying to crush the British left.

But although the left was the main objective, the enemy still had a big superiority in numbers for frontal attacks, and these they kept

up without ceasing. It was just like the crashing of many mighty hammers from one end to the other.

Following up the policy of making counter-attacks whenever possible, a bold offensive was made against the little town from which we had just been driven. The enemy had now been in possession for two or three hours. So word was passed to the batteries, some of the indefatigable cavalry was concentrated, and the infantry, with the two reinforcing battalions, received the cheering news that they were to advance.

How they all went at it! Under the heaviest fire our guns could pour in, the infantry rushed the outlying houses, the main street, and the town itself, the cavalry sweeping up on the flank. The gunners, after raising the range to put a curtain before the infantry, limbered up, and had the satisfaction of marching back through the town which they had just been forced to evacuate.

Then it was that our men first saw a little of the hideous work of the invaders upon the civilian population. And if anything more were needed to brace them up to fight to the last man, they had it in that brief hour in the recaptured town.

The hospital was burning fiercely, just as that at Mons had done. Such a building, with its Red Cross flag, was always a convenient ranging point for the enemy. In it there had been some 400 wounded and other casualties. A large number of these had been got away, but a number had, perforce, to be left. Their end must have been too cruel to dwell upon.

Up the main street everywhere was horrible evidence that *they* had been at work. Mingled with dead or wounded combatants were bodies of women and children, many terribly mutilated, while other women knelt beside them, with stone-set faces or gasping through hysterical weeping. From behind shutters or half-closed doors others looked out, blinded with terror.

But there was one thing which, for the men who saw it, dwarfed all else. Hanging up in the open window of a shop, strung from a hook in the cross-beam, like a joint in a butcher's shop, was the body of a little girl, five years old, perhaps. Its poor little hands had been hacked off, and through the slender body were vicious bayonet stabs.

Yes, close your eyes in horror, but it is right that our people should hear and know these things. There must be no false, vapid sentiment in refusing to think about them. There

should not be a home in the British Empire where the facts of German atrocities are not known, and where, in realising them, hearts are not nerved to yield their last drop of blood in stamping out from the world of men the hideous Thing which has done them.

After that the Brigade "saw red." There was no more talk of taking prisoners, and if there was another ounce they could put into their work they did it. The sight of those poor distracted women kneeling down in the road before our men, or hanging round their knees praying to be taken away, would have melted the stoniest hearts. The situation was serious enough, for another German attack in force was bound to follow, and the Brigade had little hope of getting away safely themselves. But they could not possibly leave the women behind again—nor did they. Somehow or other they escorted, on guns, limbers and vehicles, all they could find safely on to the southward road, sullenly retiring once more before the new counter-attack.

CHAPTER XII

WEDNESDAY, THE 26TH OF AUGUST
(*continued*)

A many of our bodies shall, no doubt,
Find native graves; upon the which, I trust,
Shall witness live in brass of this day's work;
And those that leave their valiant bones in France,
Dying like men, . . .
They shall be fam'd.

By midday the tide of battle had begun to roll southwards, though only by a very little. The British lines were forced back, a mile here, half a mile there, but they still held on with superhuman energy and determination. And not only did they hold on, but, wherever there was the least chance, a regiment or cavalry squadron would launch a counter-attack. But it all seemed so hopeless, just as one might throw pebbles into the waves of the sea as they break upon a beach.

Some day it is to be hoped that an adequate record will be published of the remarkable work which the cavalry performed during the Retreat. Sir John French, perhaps because he was him-

self a cavalry leader, hardly mentions them in his first dispatch. Wherever they were most wanted, there they were in the thick of the fighting. How the horses "carried on" and where and how fresh animals were obtained remains a mystery, in view of the muddle in which everything was.

But where every unit and every man worked as they did, it seems almost invidious to single out for mention any particular regiment or episode. Take a single half-hour of the fighting on the left, and you have an example of what was repeated fifty times that day across the whole British front.

A blue-grey mass of enemy infantry appears advancing with steady, swinging pace. At 500 yards or a trifle more one of our regiments opens rapid fire upon them. You can actually see the lanes in the German ranks ploughed through by the British rifle-fire. Still they advance, for the gaps are filled almost immediately. Nearer and nearer, until that regiment which began the advance has almost ceased to exist. The remnant breaks and scatters in confusion, and as they break away another new regiment is disclosed behind them. Such is the method of the German massed attack, overwhelming by sheer numbers.

But rarely did they get near enough to the British lines for a hand-to-hand fight. Regiment after regiment would be held at bay by the murderous rifle-fire of the little handful of British; regiment after regiment would appear to fill the gap. Now and again the weight of the attack would tell, and the Germans would get close enough for a final rush on the British trench. Then, at the critical moment, a British company, slightly forward on the flank, pours in a withering enfilade fire, and while the German infantry stagger under this unexpected attack the British cavalry charge through our own lines straight on the front and flank of the enemy. There are a few minutes of mad cut and thrust, and the Germans, who always dread the cold steel as a Chinese dreads rain, break and run as though all the fiends of hell were after them.

Just about this time General Smith-Dorrien and a couple of his Staff officers were following the fortunes of the battle from some rising ground not far from the centre of the line. A sudden outburst of heavy and incessant firing was heard from the direction of Cambrai, where, it will be remembered, the enemy were trying to outflank us.

"Good heavens," cried the General, "the Germans have got round our left!" And, jumping on to his horse, he galloped off towards the firing.

To his astonishment and delight he found, as he drew near the flank, that the firing came not from victorious Germans, but from some of our French comrades.

Never was help more opportune; seldom can it have come in more dramatic fashion. By all accounts General Sordêt with his cavalry should have been sitting by the roadside, forty miles away on the British right, tending his worn-out horses. Yet, at the call for help, by sheer grit and determination he and his Corps had carried through that long forced march (Heaven knows how the horses did it!), and swept up on our left with his squadrons and horse artillery. Everyone knows what splendid work the French gunners can do, and—well, this was one of their best days.

It was a thrilling episode, and why, in common justice to our gallant Allies, the details have not been published I do not know. You will find General Smith-Dorrien's record and appreciation of the invaluable help thus given by General Sordêt in the second Appendix at the end of the book.

While such were the conditions about midday up with the front line, the situation immediately in the rear was fast becoming indescribable in its confusion and complexity. Looking back at it now, after the lapse of so many months, it seemed very much like a theatrical performance where a "front cloth" has been lowered to conceal from the audience a strike of stage hands and the despair of the actors at setting the stage and getting on with the play. Before the front cloth a special "turn" is performing to gain time and appease the growing impatience of the audience.

There was, for instance, a particular centre of cross-roads, nearly a mile beyond where German shells were bursting. It was just outside a large village, and the inhabitants were streaming out with their belongings, yet uncertain whether there was actual danger or no.

At the cross-roads were gradually arriving ammunition columns, remnants of battered regiments, motor-lorries, and odd cavalry patrols; and no one had the vaguest idea as to why they were there nor where they were to go next. A Staff officer standing there was as much at sea as the rest. Every moment more and more transport would roll up, and more and more stragglers, while hanging on to the out-

skirts of the crowd were increasing numbers of frightened women and children. An old curé alone seemed calm and collected. Over another village a little way back down the road the German shells come bursting ever nearer. It must be remembered that even the Staff had but a hazy idea of the trend of events, and that outside the Staff not a soul had any notion of what was really happening to the Force. It was just a matter of doing your own special bit.

Right into this confused mass came running some R.A.M.C. orderlies. "The Germans are just behind!" they shouted. There might have been a bad panic with all those civilians about, but there was only rather more confusion. The Staff officer gave a general order to retire on St. Quentin (a large town about seven miles to the south); and then there was one mad rush.

Motor-lorries blocked the whole road, trying to reverse, while wounded and stragglers made a dash for the nearest vehicles. Ammunition columns struck off the road on to the open down-land. The refugees streamed straight across country. Down the road the heavy lorries went pounding, and soon outdistanced everyone else. At one corner there were two R.F.A. drivers in charge of five heavy

draught horses. "Germans be'ind us," yelled a lorry driver; "better move!" And they did move. The sight of those old "hairies" clopping down the road at a hand gallop after the disappearing lorries was too ludicrous for words.

By 3 P.M. the weight of the enemy's attack had begun to tell, and, to quote the Commander-in-Chief's dispatch, "it became apparent that, if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted; and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 P.M."

Now came the most critical time of all. At the beginning of the day the enemy must have imagined that a retirement would be made at the earliest opportunity. But as the hours passed, and the British line still held, the impression may have spread that they intended to fight the day to a finish where they stood. Certainly it is impossible to think that had they realised a definite retirement to be in progress, they would not have thrown every man they had upon the rear of the Corps.

Slowly and cautiously, then, regiment after regiment fell back. I have tried to show in an earlier chapter what that means and how much depends upon the guns at such a juncture.

Wednesday, the 26th of August

Again I can only quote the Commander-in-Chief's words: "The movement was covered with the most devoted intrepidity and determination by the artillery, which had itself suffered severely."

I will just give one instance of what that devotion meant, a devotion which, as has everywhere been agreed, saved the situation.

Close under a ridge a battery had been in action without a moment's rest for the last six hours. One gun after another had been knocked out, the battery commander and every officer save one killed, all the men of the detachments killed or wounded, until there was left just one gun, one subaltern, and one driver. And still they kept the battery in action; still they loaded and fired, as they had been doing all through that ghastly day.

"Got a drink?" said the subaltern; "a cigarette? Good! Thank God for a white man's cigarette again!" And he went on with his job. That was what "covering the movement" meant.

But the battle had been won. General Smith-Dorrien, his officers and men, had accomplished the almost superhuman task thrust upon them. They had not merely held the German attack through all the long hours of that blazing

August day; they had *broken* it. For the remainder of the Retreat it never recovered its sting and energy, and so the Force and Paris were saved.

Events have had time to shape themselves during the months that have lapsed since August, 1914, and it is possible to view them in a certain perspective. It has been urged that we British have exaggerated the importance of the work of the Force in the Retreat; that while we were holding a line of no more than 20 odd miles, the French were extended over a front of 400 miles against an equally strong attack; that, by the prominence given to the work of the Force to the neglect of that of the French, a distorted picture has been given of the operations during August from Alsace to the sea.

To these arguments I would reply that Germany was staking everything upon that rush to Paris. For years past we had known that her intentions were to bring France to her knees within the first month or so, to admit of turning to meet Russia before that country had fully mobilised. And so, with this definite task in view, Germany concentrated her main attack through Belgium and south by Mons. She had not only her greatest strength in the armies of

von Kluck and von Buelow, but she included in these masses of troops the flower of the German Army, picked regiments like the Prussian Guard, the "Iron" 3rd Corps of Brandenburg,[1] and others. Add to these facts the sustained violence of the invasion, and the concentrated hate which was levelled against Belgians and British by the invaders when the attack was continually and successfully checked, and I think that there is sufficient evidence to indicate the vital importance of the work of the British Force.

Moreover, the French people themselves had, with fine generosity, recognised that it was the British Force, under God's hand, which had saved Paris: for on Sunday, August 30th, prayers of thanksgiving were offered up in the churches on behalf of our troops.

And now, hopelessly inadequate as this record has so far been, words utterly fail me in attempting to describe the events of the next twelve hours, and how the Retreat was continued. It was one long, ghastly nightmare.

As regiment after regiment received its orders to retire, the survivors staggered to their

[1] This Corps is always regarded in Germany as the finest in the German Army.

feet, blinded by the ordeal of the day, and crept back until they reached a point where ranks could be formed. Then they got moving. Their destination no one knew, no one cared. . . . Keep moving! Men licked their blackened lips with parched tongues. "Any chance of a drink?" "Not here; perhaps we shall pass a village." Keep moving! "Got a fag on you?" "Smoked the last this morning; perhaps get some in the village." "Where the b—— 'ell is your village?" "Gawd knows." . . . Keep moving!

Ten minutes later. "Where the 'ell are we going? and why the —— are we retreating? Give 'em socks, didn't we? And where the —— are them —— Frenchies?" "Oh, shut yer 'ed, carn't yer?" . . . Keep moving!

There was a tiny village called Estrées in a hollow of the downs about three miles out from St. Quentin. Here at 4 P.M. the confusion was indescribable. Lorries, stragglers, refugees, transport columns, guns—all inextricably mixed up. It was, I believe, supposed to be a bivouac point for the night, but no one knew definitely. In any case, they were all tightly wedged in that hollow, and the Germans were but a very few miles behind. Had an enemy battery come within range, as it might well have done, it

would have meant certain death for every soul there. Later in the evening news got to G.H.Q. of the position, and rations were sent up to the starving troops, with definite orders about further retirement.

Staff work simply went to pieces. It was not that men lost their heads or anything like that, but the various H.Q.'s found it impossible to keep pace with events. A regiment would be in a certain position, then it would be completely forgotten (or so it seemed), and no orders would arrive to move. Many C.O.'s retired entirely on their own initiative, and so got clear. Others decided to await instructions, and so got wiped out or captured.

As dusk gathered into darkness the confusion grew worse, while discomfort increased (if possible) with the steady downpour of rain which followed. But there was no moment's rest for the exhausted troops, save when a regiment came up against an obstacle across the road—a broken-down motor-van or gun-wagon. Then, if there were any sappers handy, the vehicle would be blown up and the road cleared. . . . Anyhow, keep moving!

And the dreadful agonies of the wounded. At St. Quentin there was a big hospital which had been gradually filling during the past

twenty-four hours. Now, on this afternoon, G.H.Q. found it advisable to pack up in a hurry and leave for farther south. And the hospital—would it share the same fate as those of Mons and Le Cateau? Once again the movable cases were hastily got into ambulances and other conveyances, and carried off in the wake of G.H.Q. But for hundreds of men there was no chance of getting even so far as St. Quentin for attention. Through the day the R.A.M.C. had worked as hard as the fighters, but it was very little more than first aid which could be given. No chance for deft operation, anti-tetanus serum or the like.

So, mingled with the retreating army were the ghosts of men swathed in bloody bandages, some clinging to vehicles on which they had found a seat, others marching with vague, uncertain pace by the infantry, others, again, just dropping out, to huddle exhausted by the roadside waiting for dawn and a fate which now had no meaning for them.

Keep moving! . . . Horse after horse in the slowly trekking columns of batteries or supply transport dropped down and fouled the wheels. Unhook or cut the traces; push the poor beast out of the road. An old pal, was he? Aye, he was a fine "wheeler," that dark

bay! Remember the first time we had him in at practice camp? Nothing matters now but keeping on the move. Yes, better shoot him. He deserves a clean end.

Dozens, perhaps hundreds of men got cut adrift from their regiments that day, adrift and hopelessly lost in a strange country. No house, no village was safe as sanctuary, for the tide of invasion lapped at the threshold and would presently overwhelm it. One trivial incident I heard of seems worthy of record as an instance of "individuality" in the training of the British soldier.

A man—we will call him Headlam—got adrift by himself from the 3rd Division out on the left flank. After many hours' wandering, he came to a little farmhouse on the road. Here the good woman took him in, fed him, and gave him a shakedown. There were also there a couple of French stragglers.

A few hours later the little son of the farm came running in with the news that a patrol of the dreaded Uhlans was coming down the road. That meant murder for everyone. There was no time to hide, and the French were at their wits' end.

Headlam's first thought was for cover. Out

in the yard there was a big rain-tub. Calling the two French soldiers to help, they rolled it out longways on into the road, and one of them, with Headlam, got behind with their rifles. The moment the patrol appeared, Headlam gave the Uhlans an excellent example of rapid fire, and three saddles were empty before they realised where the attack came from. Then they charged. French and British, side by side, ground away with their rifles, and when the Uhlans reached the little fortress there were only three left out of the patrol of nine. The second Frenchman, by the side of the road, accounted for another, and, with three to two, the Uhlans surrendered.

So our three musketeers found themselves with five excellent horses and a couple of prisoners; and I leave you to picture the triumphal procession which passed through the villages on the southward journey. The order of march was: Jacques and a led horse, Pierre and a led horse, two disconsolate Uhlans on foot (and hating it), and Headlam (with female escort), as G.O.C., bringing up the rear. . . .

Keep moving! . . . But oh, the inexpressible weariness of it! No torture is more refined than that of preventing a worn-out human being

from sleeping; and here it was experienced to the full. The picture of the Force that night might well have created for Dante the vision of one more circle of Hell.

Hunger was long since forgotten, but a red-hot thirst remained. One could appreciate as never before how Dives thirsted when he asked for Lazarus to touch his lips with a moistened finger. On, ever on, for hour after eternal hour, riding or trudging through the inky darkness, never a halt. . . . Keep moving!

How the troops did it I cannot tell. It was not the triumph of will over the exhausted body, for the sense of volition had fled, and men were mere automata in their movements. The legs jerked forwards as those of a clockwork toy. Had the men halted they could never have got moving again; the clockwork would have run down.

In the saddle it was little better. Every muscle of the body ached with an intolerable dull throbbing; a deadly coma crept through the brain and dragged at the eyelids. Nerveless fingers clutched at the pommel of the saddle, and were pulled away by the drag of the heavy arms.

One knows how a single night of sleeplessness will tell its tale in the face of a man or

woman. Here was the fourth night of ceaseless fighting and marching, with only an odd hour of rest now and again.

All through the night and on into the daylight hours sounded the plod-plod of marching men, the grumble—creak—grumble of transport or guns. And in the far rear of the moving columns were more regiments lined out, showing a bold front to the still advancing enemy, ever guarding the backs of their comrades so far as was humanly possible.

One particularly sad disaster befell a regiment in the course of the retirement; it is remarkable that there were not many others of a like nature. The 1st Gordons lost their way after dark, and began to march in a direction across the front of the German advance. About midnight the regiment found itself moving into masses of troops. The first thought was that they were amongst the French, for it was supposed that they had been marching towards French support.

Suddenly fire was opened upon the regiment from all sides, and though the Gordons put up the gallant fight which they have ever done in a tight corner, the odds were too impossible, and ten minutes saw the end.

Wednesday, the 26th of August

I think that disaster affected the Force more than anything else in that opening month. Men spoke of it in hushed tones. A magnificent regiment with glorious traditions, and to be crushed out as they were in those few minutes. And yet not crushed out! Though the older generation of the family may die, there is the younger generation which follows, and their sons after them. And well do I remember that younger generation at the Aisne, when the Regiment rose again reincarnate from the ashes of the dead. I see now the stern-set faces of the officers, proud in their determination to avenge their honour; faces shaded and hallowed by the knowledge of what the Regiment had done and suffered, what it must now do and suffer that their dead may rest in peace. As it was, so shall it be,

Rising, roaring, rushing like the tide,
(Gay goes the Gordon to a fight)
They're up through the fire-zone, not to be denied;
(Bayonets! and charge! by the right!)
Thirty bullets straight where the rest went wide,
And thirty lads are lying on the bare hillside;
But they passed in the hour of the Gordons' pride,
To the skirl of the pipers' playing.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RETREAT CONTINUES

We are but warriors for the working-day;
Our gayness and our gilt are all besmirch'd
With rainy marching in the painful field;
There's not a piece of feather in our host,

. . . . .

And time hath worn us into slovenry;
But, by the mass, our hearts are in the trim.

THE following days saw no rest for the exhausted troops, and they were compelled to plod on ever farther and farther south. If the rapidity of the German advance was so astonishing, even more so was the speed at which the British retired before them. For it is a hundred times more easy to do the advancing than the retiring. In the former case there is the confidence of success, with the feeling that at any moment the coveted prize may be snapped up. In the latter there is the inevitable feeling that things are going wrong, that the army is suffering defeat, and the constant dread that the troops may not stand the tremendous strain upon their powers of endurance.

So it was that every encouragement was given to the rumour which ran through the Force that this was but a strategical retirement, part of the plan decided on years before between the French and British Headquarters Staffs. And the idea of the Retreat was that the British were to draw the Germans ever southward, while the Belgian forces were gradually closing in behind the invaders on the west, and the French doing the same on the east. Then at the psychological moment the signal would be flashed round, the British would suddenly turn and present a dead wall, the strings of the net would be pulled tight, and—hey presto! we should all be home by Christmas.

There was only one part of the scheme which everyone regretted, and that was that we should be out of the entry into Berlin. It is all very well to keep up your wicket while the other fellow makes the runs, but then the other fellow gets all the credit. You see, everybody knew for a fact that the Russians were only a couple of days from the German capital, and that heartened the Force almost more than anything else. However, one consoled the men by telling them that regiments were sure to be picked by ballot to represent the British in the march through; and as for the newspaper prizes to the

first man or regiment in—well, that regiment would surely be sporting and share the prize.

How many times one must have explained this wonderful piece of strategy to the good French folk I should not like to guess. On passing through a little village, generally at dusk, one of the things one always had to do, after dispelling the fears of the ancient policeman who tried to hold up the battery with an antiquated fowling-piece, was to draw maps on the sanded floor of the café for the edification of the local magnates.

"Why do we thus retire, madame? But it is so simple. It is a piece of strategy of the most clever. The Allemands"—here the audience spit profusely—"come thus, the Belgians are here, etc. etc. At any moment we turn to attack, etc. How many English, madame? Ah, madame, it is not permitted to tell; but for your ear, madame (and I would tell no one else), they say that the second quarter of a million disembarked yesterday."

Perhaps our kindly hosts will by now have forgiven us, but at least much of it we believed ourselves at the time. It all helped to keep the men going and prevent sudden panic with the countryfolk. It is difficult to say whether we did wrong.

The Retreat Continues

By 8 A.M. on the Thursday the retiring columns were well on their way beyond St. Quentin. The First Corps, during the eventful Wednesday, had also been steadily retiring, and had had comparatively little fighting to do. The condition of the troops will be remembered.

About half an hour later the rear-guard reached St. Quentin. The batteries marched in, watered their horses in the square, and marched out again immediately, the infantry covering them outside the town.

It was a little curious in St. Quentin—the attitude of the inhabitants. No one seemed to take any interest in the British movements, and certainly no one appeared to bother himself one atom about the German approach. St. Quentin is a big garrison town, with fine open places and streets, excellent shops and stately buildings, and the wealth of the place must be great. Yet there was never a hint of an exodus, and the people accepted the whole situation with astonishing sang-froid. I believe that when the Germans did arrive, a little later in the day, they surrounded the town and marched in from all sides at once, to find their triumphant entry opposed by—one British soldier. This man had got lost or left behind

in a house, and now turned out with his rifle to defend the town. The German division had to open fire with a machine-gun upon the gallant lad before he fell, face to the enemy, riddled with bullets. The war can have witnessed few more remarkable episodes.

The fact that the R.F.A. with the rear-guard were able to continue their retirement throughout the day without having to fire a round will show how well the Second Corps had smashed the German attack.

It should also be recorded that on this Thursday and Friday the Force had further help from the French. General Sordêt's cavalry continued its excellent work in relieving the pressure on the left of the Second Corps.

G.H.Q. had moved from St. Quentin on the Wednesday afternoon, and taken up their abode at Noyon, a cathedral town about 30 miles farther south. Here, again, no one seemed to have the slightest inkling of impending danger, and the business of the town was being carried on as usual. The mayor certainly posted a proclamation imploring the "citoyens" to remain calm and to pay no heed to rumours, and the citoyens obeyed by wondering why M. le maire should have so put himself about as to issue such a notice.

The Retreat Continues

That was on the Thursday. But on the Friday the citoyens received something of a shock. A number of British regiments marched through in broad daylight, and it was now plainly to be seen that something very serious was happening. After the first gasp of astonishment and utter incredulity, the people stood by the road in dead silence with tears of pity running down their cheeks. So long as I live I can never forget that scene, the intense drama of it, the tragedy, and the glory of achievement which shone radiantly forth.

The remnants of three gallant regiments we watched go by, and we could look no longer. There is no need to say which they were, for they were but typical of all the other regiments in the Force that day. Again there were but a poor 200 men left of each 1,000. Officers and men alike in their pitiable destitution. Barefooted, or shifts of bandages round their swollen feet; torn breeches, cut short like football knickers. Great bearded men they were, with the grime and dust of five terrible days' incessant fighting and marching upon them; but in their eyes the unquenchable light of their native pluck and steadfastness. There was no trace of defeat there, only the hungry, dazed look of men who long for a little sleep before

they turn once more to crash their way into an enemy's ranks.

It is not such things as these that our people at home are told, and so I set them down. Tales of gallant deeds in the fighting-line they have now in plenty, but the great human side of this bloody war is passed over in discreet silence. England knows nothing of the meaning of modern war; she has not suffered invasion, save from the predatory attacks of aircraft. Her sons are fighting for her, and the knowledge thrills our womenfolk; but of the conditions under which they have fought, and of the appalling sufferings of tortured Belgium and France and Poland and Serbia, they are hopelessly ignorant. If but a tenth part were thoroughly realised there would be one mighty irresistible cry from the heart of the civilised world:

"Stand at nothing to finish this war at once, and it shall be the last!"

There are no such things as *neutral* nations. If a nation refuses to be enrolled for Civilisation, then it is fighting by the side of the obscene Horror which has plunged Europe into this carnival of blood and misery.

On the Friday afternoon some of us learned from a wounded French lancer that the German

centre had been badly smashed and was actually retiring from St. Quentin, owing to a French counter-offensive; also some of our cavalry had been doing specially good work south of that town. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade broke and beat back the Prussian Guard and another cavalry regiment, and the 5th Cavalry Brigade had a similar success with other German cavalry.

In the meantime G.H.Q. had removed still farther south to Compiègne, and occupied Napoleon's magnificent palace, or a wing of it.

It had been intended to give the Force a really good rest when they reached the River Oise on the Friday night. By that time the British line (both Corps) ran along the river from La Fère to Noyon. But it was, after all, little more than five or six hours which could be spared; many of the regiments and batteries did not even get that brief respite. "Keep moving" was still the order of the day.

But for the fortunate it was a glimpse of Paradise. It meant, above all else, a proper all-over wash and a clean shirt, even though you had to wash it yourself. It meant the luxury of a shave, if you could manage to get hold of anything in the shape of a razor. There was a square meal served out, and there were two or

three hours of blessed sleep, when you lay with next to nothing on (for your shirt was drying) under a shady tree. It was all little enough, and, truth to tell, most of the men could only turn out of the ranks to fall straight into the sleep of utter exhaustion, a sleep of the clock round had it been allowed.

Tobacco in those days was a luxury, and it was needed most. Now there is a regular weekly ration, and in addition kind friends at home see that the supply of cigarettes does not fail. But in the Retreat the usual substitute was dried tea-leaves rolled in the parchment paper of the emergency ration. Tea-leaves are very nasty to smoke, but I am not sure that they are so nasty as brown paper or the seat of a cane-bottomed chair; and I have tried them all.

The men's equipment, too, was a constant source of trouble. They would throw away their greatcoats and packs, anything to march as lightly as possible. The Germans must have had a fine haul, and there were several occasions when they dressed up their infantry companies in British greatcoats and caps, and got well up to our lines before their identity was discovered.

And that reminds me that in Noyon we caught a German spy wearing no fewer than three different uniforms. First, a French; over

it a Belgian; and on top of these a khaki great-coat with cap. It was a very hot day, and the man's obvious discomfort was the first thing to give him away. It did not take ten minutes to settle that little affair.

By the time the two corps joined up again the refugee problem had become really serious. All the way back the army of unfortunates had been steadily growing larger, and it was but natural that they should hang on to the skirts of the Force for protection. How many of the poor women and little children died of exposure and exhaustion, it is impossible to tell. Our men were themselves badly off for food, but, needless to say, they were always eager to share their emergency rations with those who had nothing at all save what could be garnered in wayside village or cottage.

Rules about commandeering are most rigid; nothing must be taken without payment, or at least a voucher. I remember one C.O. buying a couple of fruit trees for his unit. But it went to the men's hearts to leave behind them tender chickens and toothsome bunnies, even though there was no chance of cooking them, to be snapped up by Germans with no such qualms of conscience.

Yet, to give the Germans credit, they did,

in many cases, give written receipts for provisions when it was a question of an odd duck or bale of hay; but when a house was properly ransacked the receipt given more usually bore the signature of that redoubtable warrior, Herr von Koepenick. It was one of the very few occasions when they showed a sense of humour, if one can call it so.

Amongst those fortunate regiments which had been able to snatch the few hours' rest there was a very general, and a very natural, impression that a definite stand was now going to be made. The position was a good one, and it was also confidently expected that more divisions were being hurried out from England as fast as ship and train could bring them.

Perhaps, under other circumstances, the stand might indeed have been made. But what we did not know was that the main French Armies away to the east were being dealt a series of such smashing blows by the Germans that they were retiring almost more quickly than we were.

Although we are concerned here solely with the fortunes of the British Force, yet it must be remembered that the fighting on the west was only a small part of the general engage-

ment, and that the Force had necessarily to conform with the main strategical idea. The capture of Paris would have been of incalculable moral value to the Germans. They recognised this, and therefore made that special bid for it. But the triumphant entry into Paris would have possessed no *real* value so long as the French and British Armies were still "in being." Just as, later, the capture of Warsaw was of little real value (save as a strategic centre), because the Russian Armies had escaped.

The position, then, on Saturday morning, the 29th, was:

(*a*) The Force was retiring, not too severely pressed by the enemy, but with continuous rear-guard actions.

(*b*) Two new French Armies (the 6th and 7th) were coming into position on our left, by Amiens and Roye.

(*c*) On our immediate right was the 5th French Army, the one which had suffered so badly after the fall of Namur.

(*d*) Generally, the French forces on the east were being steadily pushed back by the very strong enemy advance.

On that morning the Commander-in-Chief

received a visit from General Joffre, and this is what took place. I quote from Sir John French's second dispatch:

"I strongly represented my position to the French Commander-in-Chief, who was most kind, cordial and sympathetic, as he has always been. He told me that he had directed the 5th French Army on the Oise to move forward and attack the Germans on the Somme with a view to checking pursuit.

"I finally arranged with General Joffre to effect a further short retirement towards the line Compiègne—Soissons, promising him, however, to do my utmost to keep always within a day's march of him."

It may be noted here (although, of course, we did not know it till much later) that, owing to the German advance on the west, Le Havre was evacuated as the British base, and the organisation, stores, hospitals and everything, were rushed at half a day's notice right down to St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the River Loire. It was an amusing episode in the war, and quite a happy little yarn it would make; "but that is another story," as Kipling says.

On the Saturday evening the Force was got on the move again, heartened and not a little refreshed. The country-side now was as lovely

as any district in France. Gentle, undulating downs, crowned by the beautiful forest of Ligues, and besprinkled with dainty little villages and stately châteaux. If these lines should chance to be read by the mayor and mayoress of a certain little village hard by Compiègne, I would beg them to believe that the officer whom they so graciously entertained for those brief hours remembers their kindness with the deepest gratitude, and records the day as one of the most perfect he has ever spent. Officers and men made so many good friends even during those crowded hours of life, only to realise with heartfelt sorrow that perhaps half a day later their kindly hosts must have been engulfed by the tide of invasion.

I vividly recall how curious seemed that order to go on retiring when, from all accounts, the German centre had the previous day been so badly beaten. Madame's instincts, when the order came, were only too correct. She guessed the truth; we continued our trek hopelessly blind to the real facts.

CHAPTER XIV

PAST COMPIÈGNE

KING HENRY. *The sum of all our answer is but this :*
We would not seek a battle, as we are ;
Nor, as we are, we say we will not shun it.
. . . . .
We are in God's hand, brother, not in theirs.
March to the bridge ; . . .
Beyond the river we'll encamp ourselves,
And on to-morrow bid them march away.

THE destruction of a bridge, especially if it spans a river, always seems to me so pathetic. Bridges are such companionable things; they fall so readily into one's mood, and there are, I imagine, few persons who do not possess pleasant memories of one or another. Whether in town or country, there is always fascination in staying one's journey for a few minutes to lean over the parapet and watch the stream—the basking of a trout amongst the pebbles, the sway of the water-weeds, the trailing of heavy barges, or the twinkling shore-lights.

In Compiègne there is a particularly handsome structure which spans the River Oise. The French people love a noble bridge to ferry

their broad highways over the rivers, and I cannot help thinking that it was not alone special reliance upon the workmanship of our sappers which induced the French authorities to resign to them the destruction. For, whenever possible, British sappers were called in for the work. They made such a clean job of it, the French would say. No; it was, I feel sure, their affection and pride for beautiful works of art with tender associations that made them reluctant to lay sacrilegious hands upon them.

It must have been on Sunday, the 30th, that the last of the Force marched through or past Compiègne, and the bridge, besides many another, was blown up. The R.F.A. of the rear-guard passed through the town and halted, guns unlimbered, about 500 yards out the other side, ready to open fire, if necessary, for they were being hard pressed. The fuses were laid and lighted literally in face of the advancing enemy, and two R.E. officers who were doing the work were killed by enemy bullets. With a terrific crash the bridge fell, cut in two, and the retirement was continued while the Germans hurled impotent curses and (at that time) ineffectual shells after the column.

The Second Corps had now reached country which was very difficult not only for manœuvre,

but especially so for transport. Immediately after you leave Compiègne its glorious forest is entered, and directly that is passed it is a country of very steep ravines, thickly wooded, with little villages clinging limpet-like to the ridges. The heat of the day, too, was most trying.

The First Corps, which had joined up at Noyon, crossed the Aisne, and continued its retirement via Soissons.

The German pursuit, which during the last two or three days had seemed to slacken off, began to get serious again on the afternoon of Monday, the 31st.

About 3 P.M. three field batteries and the Brigade of Guards (First Corps) were out by Villers-Cotterets, and the Germans were pushing on almost as fast as they did during the first days. Their guns came into action at about 1,700 yards, and as our brigade there was far outnumbered, orders were given to go on retiring.

Well, the major of one of the batteries was "fed up" with retiring without getting some of his own back, so he put his telescope (a battery carries a telescope) to his blind eye and said he'd be hanged before he retired (or words to that effect), and "let's give them a dressing down first."

So it was "Halt; action right!" and, after a couple of ranging shots, "Two rounds gun-fire!" And that was all that battery got in. The Germans put a couple of guns out of action, and then turned their attention to the wagon line, where they made a considerable mess-up with the teams.

That settled it. "Signal the teams up and let's get out of it!" said the major; and it was so. The quartermaster-sergeant put the fear of God, not the Germans, into the drivers; up came the teams, "rear limber up," and away they went, damaged guns and all. The Guards meanwhile had gone on.

There was nothing particularly heroic about it all, but it was very excusable, and it certainly helped to buck the men up a little.

The Guards, however, gave further excellent evidence of their fighting qualities in a series of stiff hand-to-hand encounters in the forest glades. While they suffered badly, they succeeded again and again in beating back the enemy's attacks, and so further relieving the pressure on the rear.

Now, despite the continuous fighting and marching, there was no doubt whatever that the men were daily becoming more war-hardened

and fit. The worst was over, and with that firm conviction their spirits grew lighter. During the first few days the troops were marching perhaps 25 to 30 miles a day, apart from the fighting. Take, for instance, Wednesday, the 26th. The men had begun that great fight practically tired out. They fought all day, and then at the end of it did a retirement of some 25 miles. Staff officers were simply worn out by the nerve-racking ordeal, and General Smith-Dorrien himself says that he did not average more than two hours' sleep during the first six days.

But the week's campaigning had done more for the troops than ten years' peace work. Their self-reliance, their confidence in and affection for their officers were evidenced in a hundred ways; while officers, for their part, had perfect confidence in their men and knew that, however impossible an order might seem, it would be carried out. The Force was, in short, one big happy family. Everybody seemed to know everybody else, and that meant that everybody helped everybody else. After the Marne it was never quite the same, because the Force began to increase in size. New-comers were immediately recognised, and the old hands could never resist a momentary exhibition of

very pardonable pride at having "been out since the beginning."

The heavy losses in officers and N.C.O.'s had an inevitable effect on discipline, though it might well have been worse had not the sense of discipline amongst the rank and file been so strong. It must be remembered that so soon as the vanguard of the retiring Force passed through a village, practically the whole of the inhabitants would pack up such few of their belongings as they could carry on light carts, perambulators and any available vehicle, and then join the ever-growing stream of refugees. So the next units to pass through would find nothing but empty houses, and the temptation to carry away a few "souvenirs" was very hard to check, especially in the case of food.

One man of an infantry regiment "found" a horse wandering loose in a field. He was very tired, so why, thought he, should he not take what the gods sent him? He did, and rode the horse for a couple of days. Knowing nothing about horses, the poor beast got little enough to eat, and the man thought that the heaven-sent gift was becoming a nuisance. So he talked the matter over with a pal, and swopped his charger for—a packet of Wood-

bines! And I don't think the pal was a canny Scot either.

I remember particularly the date September 1st, and going through the little town of Crépy-en-Valois, because we then realised for the first time that something was wrong about that "strategical retirement" business. Our maps included Belgium and all N.E. France, but Compiègne was the farthest point south; and when we had retired below that town we knew that retreat so far south was not a part of the original scheme.

Then most of us saw some French troops for the first time, and, ominous sign, they were always engaged in barricading and mining the roads, opening the barricades to let us pass through.

But Tuesday, September 1st, must ever be a red-letter day in the annals of the Royal Regiment, on account of the famous fight of L Battery, R.H.A., at Nery, hard by Compiègne. I always regard that episode as one of the most wonderful incidents in this war. Nor do I think so because it was my own regiment, though naturally one can appreciate it the more from being a Gunner. The story is, of course, well known, but no repetition can mar the effect, however bald the telling of it may be.

L Battery was working with the 1st Cavalry Brigade, which was made up of the 2nd Dragoons (Queen's Bays), the 11th Hussars, and the 5th Dragoons. For the benefit of the uninitiated it may be explained that a horse artillery battery of six guns forms an integral part of a cavalry brigade; wherever the cavalry go, there can go the "Horse Gunners," for the gun is of lighter calibre than that of the field batteries.

About 2 o'clock in the morning word reached Second Corps H.Q. that a strong force of Germans, 90 guns and cavalry, was moving towards the 1st Cavalry Brigade in bivouac at Nery. The Third Army Corps, which was still included in General Smith-Dorrien's command, was also not far away. Our cavalry were actually bivouacked within about 600 yards of the Germans, and I believe that our outposts were, for some reason or other, not sufficiently advanced.

In an earlier chapter, writing of Captain Francis Grenfell, I have remarked that there was one other to whose life might well be applied the phrase: "*Sans peur et sans reproche.*" That other was Captain E. K. Bradbury, of L Battery. All that I have ventured to say of Grenfell I would say also of

Bradbury. I doubt whether there ever lived a Gunner officer who was more beloved by his men, or one more worthy to be so beloved. And when that is said, what else remains?

Half-past four in the morning, and the mists have scarcely begun to rise above the beech trees. You picture the guns of L Battery parked in line just on the downward slope of a slight hill and in a little clearing of the woods. The horses of the gun-teams are tethered to the gun and limber-wheels; others are down at a little stream hard by, where some of the men are washing and scrubbing out their shirts. The Queen's Bays are in bivouac in a neighbouring field.

"Some of our scouts out there, aren't they?" remarked a shoeing-smith, pointing to some rising ground about 500 yards to the north; "or is it French cursers?" (cuirassiers).

"Looks more like Germans to me," said one of the gunners. "Let's have a squint through the telescope."

"What's up?" said the sergeant-major, passing at the moment.

"Half a mo!" mumbled the gunner, eye glued to the battery telescope. "Yes, it is—Germans—I can see the spiky helmets."

"Rot," returned the sergeant-major; "can't be!"

"Anyway, I'm off to report to the captain," said the gunner.

Bradbury was talking to the horses by one of the guns when a breathless gunner of the battery staff appeared with the telescope.

"Beg pardon, sir, but there are——"

CRASH! A percussion shell burst clean in the middle of the battery, followed the next instant by a couple more. And in the few moments' breathless pause it was realised that practically every horse and every driver was either killed outright or wounded.

"Action rear!" yelled Bradbury, who found himself in command.

Their leader's voice above the unholy din pulled them together, and the gun detachments, such as were left, leaped to the trails to get the limbers clear. But no more than three guns could they get into action.

Now a tornado of shell and machine-gun bullets from close range burst over and through the devoted remnant—Bradbury, three subalterns (Giffard, Campbell and Mundy), the sergeant-major, a sergeant, a couple of gunners, and a driver. And in action against them were

ten German field-guns, and two machine-guns enfilading from the wood.

Of their three guns, they had now to abandon two.

"All hands number 2 gun!" called Bradbury, who, with the sergeant, had already opened fire.

The others rushed the few yards to Bradbury's gun; but even in that short space Giffard was hit five times. Bradbury acted as No. 1 (layer), the sergeant No. 2, while Mundy acted as observing officer. One of the gunners and the driver carried across all the ammunition by hand, through the hail of lead, from the firing battery wagons.

The range was, say, 600 yards, but in such a nerve-racking storm it was difficult for the little detachment to work clearly with no one to observe the burst of the shells. There was only a little chance, but Mundy took it, and stepped calmly out from the shelter of the gun-shield to observe.

Then No. 2 gun began its work in earnest.

"Five minutes more left," said Mundy; "add twenty-five."

Crack went the report. "One out!" said Mundy.

"Ten minutes more right; drop twenty-five."

Crack again! "Short," murmured Mundy; then, "add twenty-five."

"Two out!" he counted.

When three German guns had been counted out, Bradbury called over his shoulder to the sergeant-major:

"Take my place; I'll load for a bit."

He had barely changed places when a bursting shell carried away a leg at the thigh. Yet, by some superhuman will-power, he stuck to his post and went on loading.

Now Mundy was mortally wounded. Then Campbell fell. But still the gun was served, laid, and fired. And as surely were the German guns being counted out, one by one.

Then there burst true another shell. The gallant Bradbury received his death-wound, and his other leg was carried away. The rest of the detachment were all wounded. Still that tiny remnant stuck to it through the storm.

Now only are left the sergeant-major, Sergeant Nelson, the gunner, and the driver. Still they work. Still they watch one enemy gun after another ceasing to fire, until all are counted out but one.

All the ammunition is finished. Nothing

left now but to crawl back out of that hell. I Battery coming up? Well, they can finish it. Lend us some "wheelers" to get our guns back.

So were the six guns of L Battery brought out of action. Torn and battered, but safe. Glorious relics of perhaps the most wonderful action a battery of the Regiment has ever fought—and won.

I Battery opened on the massed columns of the German cavalry now appearing, and rent mighty lanes through their ranks, turned and scattered them. The Queen's Bays, who had been working as infantry, for their horses stampeded when the firing began, collected up, and with I Battery and the Lincolns went over the hill after the retiring enemy.

There they found the German battery out of action and abandoned.

And Bradbury? His last conscious words were an appeal for morphia and to be carried away as quickly as possible that his men might not witness his agony and be unnerved.

So passed that heroic soul away. A life nobly spent, a death nobly encountered.

Nothing is here for tears,
. . . nothing but well and fair
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

CHAPTER XV

THE FINAL STAGES

FRENCH KING. *'Tis certain he hath passed the river Somme.*
CONSTABLE OF FRANCE. *And if he be not fought withal, my lord,*
Let us not live in France: let us quit all,
And give our vineyards to a barbarous people.

THE fighting in the neighbourhood of Compiègne developed into something of a general action, an action in which the British more than held their own. There was some doubt whether the 4th Division would be able to shake off the heavy attack which was being made upon them, so another brigade was ordered to their help. The retirement was then easily effected.

The 3rd Brigade was a little north of Crépy-en-Valois, and, without waiting for the enemy, themselves made a spirited advance for a short distance, and did excellent work with their R.F.A. against the German infantry.

Soon after midnight on Wednesday, September 2nd, the Force continued its retirement. There may have been some little grumbling, and it became increasingly difficult to keep up

the old fiction—now indeed a fact—about a "strategical retirement"; but, somehow or other, a genuine conviction was stealing through the ranks that at any moment the real end would come. If our men were very, very weary, so also were the enemy, and every day brought fresh evidence of the fact.

Then, too, news came to us that the French (the 7th Army) were really tackling von Buelow's armies, and were doing well against them. That had a very inspiriting effect.

Now the Force, or rather our left, was actually in sight of the outlying forts of Paris, about a dozen miles off. Great was the excitement, for, of course, everyone jumped to the conclusion that we were making for the capital. G.H.Q. was at Lagny-sur-Marne, just 15 miles due east of Paris. They actually got as far south as Melun, on the outskirts of the Forest of Fontainebleau, before the tide turned.

If you look at these places on the picture-map you will see that, after Senlis was passed, the Force, instead of retiring straight on towards Paris, as it had been doing, now swung round, with the right flank of the First Corps as pivot, and marched in a south-easterly direction. Possibly the enemy imagined from this that their chance had come, and that they

would now be able to slip in between our left and Paris. But the new French army was coming up from behind Paris, upon our left, to fill the gap and cover the approaches to the city.

That swinging round movement to cross the River Marne was rather a risky business, for it meant marching for a certain distance *across* the enemy's front. However, it was successfully accomplished, and by the evening of September 3rd the Force was south of the river. That same afternoon our aircraft reported that the Germans had also swung eastwards, and were now apparently making for the large town of Château-Thierry, the point of division between our extreme right and the 5th French Army.

The position in which the Force found themselves that evening was wellnigh hopeless from a defensive point of view. To make matters worse, we were very badly off for entrenching tools, the men having lost the greater part in the hurried retirement after the hard battle of the Wednesday. This question of entrenching tools was further complicated by the removal of our base to St. Nazaire, for that meant a much more serious difficulty in getting up supplies.

I forgot to mention that when orders reached

the Second Corps and 4th Division on the Thursday night to keep on the move, instructions were given by G.H.Q. to abandon everything, even the ammunition, which might retard the transport, and so to leave the vehicles free for wounded or the more exhausted of the men. Only one Division carried out the order, and that only partially, before the G.O.C. Second Corps on the spot realised it was unnecessary and countermanded it.

During and after the battle of Le Cateau, as I have said the fight of the Wednesday has come to be spoken of, a rather curious adventure befell one of the motor transport ammunition parks. About ten of the lorries, under an A.S.C. subaltern, had been doing some detached work away from the main body. These had got out of rather a tight corner, but the rest of the park (some sixty odd lorries) had become involved in that mix-up at Estrées.

About 3 P.M. the A.S.C. captain in charge received an order to go back in the direction of Le Cateau. This was, apparently, straight into the advancing enemy, who were only some three or four miles off. The C.O. obeyed his orders and took his lorries back. From that moment those sixty great lorries vanished into thin air,

and not a soul knew what had happened to them. At G.H.Q. the unit was officially reported as "missing," and it so appeared, I believe, in the London Press.

The subaltern invented and spread abroad a delicious yarn. I omit his version of his own adventures, for he got a "mention in dispatches" for it, though this was subsequently quashed.

When the order to go back was received, he said, and annihilation of the park seemed certain, the O.C. called his subalterns together and told them the position. They unanimously decided to obey and charge the advancing enemy with the lorries. The drivers (our old friends the busmen) were instructed to go full speed ahead into the enemy column. But the drivers were not having any. So the officers produced their revolvers and threatened to shoot any man who refused to obey. That decided them. "We will die by German bullets rather than British." So away they went, the lorries bumping along the road straight into the ranks of the astonished Germans. Nothing could stop them, and the column got through (the narrator forgot to mention where to) with the loss of about half the park.

The subaltern carried his arm in a sling for

a fortnight afterwards. A shrapnel splinter, he said, when they were rushing the enemy. It had really been caused by the back-fire of a motor-bike. Possibly this is the origin of that glorified picture which appeared in certain of the London illustrated papers.

The park was, however, actually lost for nearly a week. They had vanished as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed them. They were eventually heard of by the merest accident, when a sergeant came in to one of the towns on the line of retreat to get provisions. But even then they could not be found, for the sergeant had gone again without leaving his address. So for days Staff officers scoured the country in swift cars, and thus the park was eventually run to earth. No one was more surprised than the C.O. to hear that he had been lost. They had not seen a single German, and they had had such a jolly time, thank you, seeing the pretty country.

But to tell of half the curious or amusing incidents I should need a volume many times the size of this one. Things happened every day any one of which would provide a newspaper with a column of excellent "copy." At the time one thought little about them, for everybody was too busy looking after his job

and himself. There was, for instance, the Adventure of the Flat-Nosed Bullet, the Adventure of the Man with the Crooked Ear, the Adventure of the Field Cashier and the Pay Chest, the Adventure of the Blood-stained Putty Knife, the Adventure of the Perishing Cat, and many another.

The great question on the morning of Friday, September 4th, was: "Are we going right back to the Seine, with our left on Paris?" You picture the Force, tired enough but in most excellent fettle, growing hourly more impatient, longing with all their hearts to turn and have a go at the enemy who had caused them all that trouble and discomfort.

"Give a guess," I asked two of my sergeants that day, "how long we have been out here?"

They thought for a few minutes. "Six weeks," they said; "perhaps seven."

And, you see, it was only a fortnight after all. But they would not believe it until a calendar was produced. Unconsciously everyone reckoned each night as another day, for nights and days were alike so far as work was concerned. I think that remark was more telling than pages of descriptive writing.

The days during those final stages were almost tropical in their heat, which told very severely on men and horses. The nights were chill and wet. So altogether one had one's work cut out in mothering the men. Cases of bowel complaints were very common, and one has to be so careful to prevent serious developments. The lads really need looking after like children, bless them! Aromatic chalk-powder with opium (5-grain tablets) I found an excellent remedy, and cured dozens of cases. So there is a little tip for other officers. Calomel is useful, too, and I saved much agony from bad wounds by doses of opium (1-grain tablets), but this must not be given in cases of stomach wounds—most to be dreaded of any. Aspirin, also, is, of course, invaluable. Certainly no officer should be without a small medicine-case, and it is the one thing they never seem to think of when getting kit together. A trivial lapse, this, into egotism, I am afraid. I hope it will be excused for the sake of the hints offered.

In the evening of September 4th orders came to continue the retirement still farther. The Second Corps marched through most of the night towards the River Seine, the First Corps conforming to the movement on the east. The

6th French Army was coming up well on our left, and thus the western end of the Franco-British line was gradually swinging round and up between Paris and the right flank of the Germans, who were now definitely moving east-south-east. You must remember, though, that these facts were only apparent at the time to a handful of officers of the Headquarters Staff; everyone else was still in the dark. But how thrilling those hours must have been to an airman observing from above, and who knew the facts.

On the 5th (Saturday), at noon, one battery found itself halted in a field by the 12-kilometre stone from Paris, and the men were confident that "la ville lumière" was their next stop. There was an undercurrent of excitement, for another couple of thousand men had joined up to the corps as reinforcements. It was a definite halt and a rest, the first they had had since Mons, and they were making the most of it.

Just about 6 P.M. the major came into the lines with a paper in his hand. There was something in his walk, something about him —the men jumped up as he approached. "Paris?"—the major shook his head. "Not —not—is it advance, sir?" The major

nodded. "We are going to advance," he said.

ADVANCE!

There was a cheer which must have startled the French Government in Bordeaux, or wherever they had gone to.

The drivers rushed at their horses, the gunners rushed to the limbers to help hook in. "Stand to your horses!" sang out the sergeant-major. Then, in a very few minutes: "Battery all ready, sir!"

The major stood up in his stirrups with a splendid laugh in his eyes.

"Sub-sections right-about-wheel! Walk, march!"

Another rousing shout, which soon merged into the cheery strains of "All aboard for Dixie," and the battery began a march, this time in the right direction, which only stopped at 2 A.M. for the sake of the horses. The men were ready to go on for a week.

The great Retreat had ended. The Advance had begun.

How and why the tide turned against the invaders at that, for them, most critical moment we cannot exactly tell. It was, as I see it, a combination of circumstances. There was the imminence of the Russian invasion into Prussia,

and it was said that the Germans withdrew two army corps from the Western front to meet it. There was the sudden production by the French Commander-in-Chief of an entirely new French army from behind Paris to attack the German right.

But one thing, at least, is certain. Von Kluck made, perhaps, the biggest mistake in his life in imagining that "the contemptible little army" which he and his legions had been hunting for a fortnight was now too dispirited and broken for further fighting; and, with that conviction in his mind, he started to do the very thing which the most elementary military text-books tell you is absolutely wrong. He moved his army across the unbroken front of a hostile force.

General Smith-Dorrien had been compelled to do the same thing with the Second Corps only three days before. But he did it with the full knowledge of the dangers, and he took every possible precaution to obviate them. He succeeded.

Von Kluck, in his delusion, saw no danger. He failed.

"I should conceive it," says Sir John French, "to have been about noon on September 6th . . . that the enemy realised the powerful

threat that was being made against the flank of his columns moving south-east, and began the great retreat which opened the battle of the Marne."

* * * * *

And there I draw the tableau curtains on the first act of the drama.

How inadequately the story has been told, or rather outlined, no one is more conscious than the writer. For every omission the critics may find, I will find two. But if I have so written that the great-hearted public may realise a little more of what the Retreat from Mons meant to the lads of ours who worked and fought so marvellously, to themselves at home, to our brothers and sisters overseas, then indeed I am satisfied.

Of necessity I have had to omit a great deal which may not be told until the war has ended. To an officer on the active list freedom of speech is rightly denied. But some day I shall hope to write in fuller detail and to do more justice to the work of individuals. It is only right that the public should learn the actual facts.

The glory of the achievement lay not merely in the hourly repulse, over a period of fourteen days, of an overwhelming attack, and of a continued retirement, which somehow never broke,

before such an inveterate pursuit. But there was also the big question of temperament. The Germans knew exactly what they wanted, and they went straight for it, backed by all the resources of their wonderful organisation working to that particular end for a decade of years or longer. The British, on the other hand, were thrust into the breach literally at the last moment, a week late, and then had to fight for a fortnight in total ignorance of the course of events.

I recall a remark once made by General Joffre :

"The better he understands the importance of the movements of the attack wherein he participates, the braver the French soldier fights, and the more trust he puts in the measures taken by his leaders."

While the converse may not always be true, it will, I think, suggest how very difficult is the execution of a delicate piece of strategy when the officers and men are ignorant of the motives which prompt it.

The Retreat was carried to a successful conclusion because, by the inherent qualities of race, it was a piece of work of a character in which the British Army has always excelled; and also, in face of the terrible engines of

modern slaughter, because of the splendid discipline of the men and their training as individual human beings.

Of the invariable cheerfulness of the men I have given several examples; but I would again attempt to correct the popular impression that such cheerfulness is no more than the cracking of jokes on all occasions. No, it is something far deeper and finer than that. The casual observer will watch a party of sappers mending a road, under fire, with loads of flint stones. He will hear them grumbling about the shocking waste of the ratepayers' money, and will then write home a letter for publication narrating the incident as a funny remark under fire. He omits to point out that it is only the cheery spirits of the men (and, of course, discipline, etc.) which make possible the clean finish of the work.

So it was in the Retreat. The men were far too exhausted to crack jokes, but the unconquerable soul of them rose high above every obstacle, and so the work was done.

Looking back over what I have written, I find that, quite unconsciously, I have said little or nothing of the work of the officers. Yet there is nothing else that I can say. It is not

for me to remark upon the work of our leaders and of my brother-officers. I can only repeat the words of the Commander-in-Chief, and I venture to do so because the general public bothers but little with official dispatches.

"It is impossible," Sir John French remarked, "for me to speak too highly of the skill evinced by the two General Officers Commanding Army Corps; the self-sacrificing and devoted exertions of their Staffs; the direction of the troops by Divisional, Brigade and Regimental leaders; the command of the smaller units by their officers; and the magnificent fighting spirit displayed by non-commissioned officers and men."

But in the Commander-in-Chief's dispatches there is one officer whose name shines out like a beacon. You who have followed in spirit the work of the Second Corps on August 26th will have realised the imperishable debt which the nation owes to the General Officer Commanding that corps. The verdict of posterity will but confirm that of the present generation.

Again I can but quote the Commander-in-Chief:

"I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the

valuable services rendered by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

"I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of August 26th could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation."

At the head of my sketch of that day's work I have set Shakespeare's immortal lines on St. Crispin's Day. May one who was privileged to serve as a member of that "band of brothers" on that day venture to offer his poor tribute to the leader of that band?

From Mons to the Marne, wherever the fight was hottest, wherever his men were working against heaviest odds, there was the General at hand to help and stiffen them. The outposts before Mons were heavily engaged; the General was up with them, under shell-fire, to see how things were going. Through the days that followed, wherever opportunity served, their commander stepped from his car to say a few words of cheery encouragement to the passing troops. Was there a field hospital, a passing ambulance?—again, those few words of kindly inquiry which made the poor sufferers forget

everything save only the desire to be well again to give their chief, and Britain, all that was in them. If the Commander-in-Chief owed so much to General Smith-Dorrien, I can only say that the Second Corps would have stormed the gates of Hell for their leader, and would have trusted implicitly in him to bring them through.

I seem to have said practically nothing about the Flying Corps, and very little about the Sappers. I am afraid that I saw very little of our aeroplane work until the Aisne, and so I cannot speak from personal observation. In fact, there are far too many omissions in this brief chronicle.

> But pardon, gentles all,
>
> . . . . .
>
> Oh, pardon! since a crooked figure may
> Attest in little place a million;
> And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
> On your imaginary forces work,
>
> . . . . .
>
> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.

Indeed, I find it quite impossible to speak of one branch of the Force more than another. It was just one perfect whole. Thus I have, so far as possible, refrained from designating particular regiments. If I have written of the

9th Lancers or L Battery it is because the gallant work of those units is already a household word throughout the Empire. But, so far as that first fortnight was concerned, there was not a single unit, officer or man, who did not achieve something equally as gallant did the opportunity come his way. Indeed, had it not been so, the Retreat could never have been accomplished as it was. Every man played the game for his side, and, in consequence, that side won.

And if that were so, then there can be no question of "mentions in dispatches," D.S.O.'s and D.C.M.'s. Every regiment in the firing-line should be "mentioned." If, by great good fortune, a regiment achieves some specially noble piece of work which comes to the notice of the authorities, then, say I, let the Colour of that regiment be decorated. To single out individuals, to give a Victoria Cross to the colonel, a D.S.O. to the senior major, a Military Cross to the senior captain, and so on, is to create jealousy, and is, also, unfair to others.

Humanity, the other noble trait in the character of our men, I have barely mentioned, for it seems quite unnecessary to do so. It is a characteristic of British sailors and soldiers

which is always taken for granted. One need only recall some of the many occasions in our naval actions when British sailors have rescued Germans at the peril of their lives, and have been fired at while doing so. And set in contrast the murderous attack by German destroyers upon the crew of a British submarine stranded on the Swedish coast.

And so it has been with our soldiers. Our men invariably enter a fight with the innate feeling that it is a sporting contest, where you shake hands with your adversary before and after the fight. If he knocks out his adversary, then the winner is the man to help him to his feet.

We have seen from the very beginning that "chivalry" and "fair play" are words unknown to the Germans. To them nothing matters but to win, preferably by foul means. So, on the very first day, British soldiers were terribly undeceived. They saw German infantry advancing to the attack behind a screen of Belgian women and children, driven on at the bayonet point. From then onwards we lost hundreds of gallant men simply through their feelings of humanity towards wounded enemies, being shot at by other Germans, or being treacherously shot or stabbed by the very man

to whose lips they were holding a flask of water.

And yet, with such examples before them of their comrades' fate, the sense of humanity and chivalry was never dulled. Despite the stringent orders on the subject, the men, even now, hesitate to fire when the enemy raises a white flag, and will always, whenever possible, succour a wounded German lying before the trench. These are the men who have only, as yet, learned of German treachery by hearsay evidence. But there are others. There are companies and battalions who know from ghastly experience. These men adopt other methods.

But nothing I can write will make people at home understand what this war really is. Nothing, short of actual experience, can do that. Stay, perhaps there is one thing: the genius of Louis Raemaekers. He, at least, by his cartoons, is bringing home to millions the hideous meaning of this war. And not only of this war, but of all modern war. I would have a volume of his cartoons distributed gratis by the Government to every household in the kingdom. I would have half a dozen of the cartoons thrown upon the screen in every cinema-house at every entertainment. The people would shudder with horror, but they

would see them and learn what Germany is and what war means.

Apart from this, I hold it to be the sacred duty of every man and woman who can use a pen to advantage, or who can command the attention of an audience, to make known this meaning. To cry from the housetops what is this foul thing which Germany has thrust upon the world, and to show the people why and how Civilisation must crush it out for ever.

There is no greater honour to-day that a man may wear—alas, there are but few left to wear it!—than the honour of having served his King and Country in France throughout August and September, 1914. Just that. He needs no decoration, no "mention." He served through the "Retreat from Mons." In days to come our children, our children's children, will point with pride to that one little word on the regimental colour, "Mons." For in that single word will be summed up the Liberation of the World. It was the victory of the Marne which won for Civilisation that freedom, but it was, under God's hand, the British Navy, the stand of Belgium, and the "Retreat from Mons" which made that victory possible.

APPENDIX I

MILITARY DESPATCHES FROM THE FIELD-MARSHAL COMMANDING-IN-CHIEF, BRITISH FORCES IN THE FIELD, DATED SEPTEMBER 7TH AND 17TH

7th September, 1914.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to report the proceedings of the Field Force under my command up to the time of rendering this despatch.

1. The transport of the troops from England both by sea and by rail was effected in the best order and without a check. Each unit arrived at its destination in this country well within the scheduled time.

The concentration was practically complete on the evening of Friday, the 21st ultimo, and I was able to make dispositions to move the Force during Saturday, the 22nd, to positions I considered most favourable from which to commence operations which the French Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre, requested me to undertake in pursuance of his plans in prosecution of the campaign.

Position at Mons

The line taken up extended along the line of the canal from Condé on the west, through Mons and Binche on the east. This line was taken up as follows :—

From Condé to Mons inclusive was assigned to the Second Corps, and to the right of the Second Corps from

Mons the First Corps was posted. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was placed at Binche.

In the absence of my Third Army Corps I desired to keep the Cavalry Division as much as possible as a reserve to act on my outer flank, or move in support of any threatened part of the line. The forward reconnaissance was entrusted to Brigadier-General Sir Philip Chetwode with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, but I directed General Allenby to send forward a few squadrons to assist in this work.

During the 22nd and 23rd these advanced squadrons did some excellent work, some of them penetrating as far as Soignies, and several encounters took place in which our troops showed to great advantage.

Sunday, August 23

2. At 6 a.m., on August 23rd, I assembled the Commanders of the First and Second Corps and Cavalry Division at a point close to the position, and explained the general situation of the Allies, and what I understood to be General Joffre's plan. I discussed with them at some length the immediate situation in front of us.

From information I received from French Headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at most two, of the enemy's Army Corps, with perhaps one Cavalry Division, were in front of my position; and I was aware of no attempted outflanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observation of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate.

About 3 p.m. on Sunday, the 23rd, reports began coming in to the effect that the enemy was commencing an attack on the Mons line, apparently in some strength, but that the right of the position from Mons and Bray was being particularly threatened.

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The Commander of the First Corps had pushed his flank back to some high ground south of Bray, and the 5th Cavalry Brigade evacuated Binche, moving slightly south : the enemy thereupon occupied Binche.

The right of the 3rd Division, under General Hamilton, was at Mons, which formed a somewhat dangerous salient ; and I directed the Commander of the Second Corps to be careful not to keep the troops on this salient too long, but, if threatened seriously, to draw back the centre behind Mons. This was done before dark. In the meantime, about 5 p.m., I received a most unexpected message from General Joffre by telegraph, telling me that at least three German Corps, viz., a reserve corps, the 4th Corps and the 9th Corps, were moving on my position in front, and that the Second Corps was engaged in a turning movement from the direction of Tournay. He also informed me that the two reserve French Divisions and the 5th French Army on my right were retiring, the Germans having on the previous day gained possession of the passages of the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur.

Monday, August 24

3. In view of the possibility of my being driven from the Mons position, I had previously ordered a position in rear to be reconnoitred. This position rested on the fortress of Maubeuge on the right and extended west to Jenlain, south-east of Valenciennes, on the left. The position was reported difficult to hold, because standing crops and buildings made the siting of trenches very difficult and limited the field of fire in many important localities. It nevertheless afforded a few good artillery positions.

When the news of the retirement of the French and the heavy German threatening on my front reached me, I endeavoured to confirm it by aeroplane reconnaissance ; and as a result of this I determined to effect a retire-

ment to the Maubeuge position at daybreak on the 24th.

A certain amount of fighting continued along the whole line throughout the night, and at daybreak on the 24th the 2nd Division from the neighbourhood of Harmignies made a powerful demonstration as if to retake Binche. This was supported by the artillery of both the 1st and 2nd Divisions, whilst the 1st Division took up a supporting position in the neighbourhood of Peissant. Under cover of this demonstration the Second Corps retired on the line Dour—Quarouble—Frameries. The 3rd Division on the right of the Corps suffered considerable loss in this operation from the enemy, who had retaken Mons.

The Second Corps halted on this line, where they partially entrenched themselves, enabling Sir Douglas Haig with the First Corps gradually to withdraw to the new position ; and he effected this without much further loss, reaching the line Bavai—Maubeuge about 7 p.m. Towards midday the enemy appeared to be directing his principal effort against our left.

Work of the Cavalry

I had previously ordered General Allenby with the Cavalry to act vigorously in advance of my left front and endeavour to take the pressure off.

About 7.30 a.m. General Allenby received a message from Sir Charles Fergusson, commanding 5th Division saying that he was very hard pressed and in urgent need of support. On receipt of this message General Allenby drew in the Cavalry and endeavoured to bring direct support to the 5th Division.

During the course of this operation General De Lisle, of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, thought he saw a good opportunity to paralyse the further advance of the enemy's infantry by making a mounted attack on his flank. He formed up and advanced for this purpose, but was held

up by wire about 500 yards from his objective, and the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars suffered severely in the retirement of the Brigade.

The 19th Infantry Brigade, which had been guarding the Line of Communications, was brought up by rail to Valenciennes on the 22nd and 23rd. On the morning of the 24th they were moved out to a position south of Quarouble to support the left flank of the Second Corps.

With the assistance of the Cavalry Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien was enabled to effect his retreat to a new position; although, having two corps of the enemy on his front and one threatening his flank, he suffered great losses in doing so.

At nightfall the position was occupied by the Second Corps to the west of Bavai, the First Corps to the right. The right was protected by the Fortress of Maubeuge, the left by the 19th Brigade in position between Jenlain and Bry, and the Cavalry on the outer flank.

Tuesday, August 25

4. The French were still retiring, and I had no support except such as was afforded by the Fortress of Maubeuge; and the determined attempts of the enemy to get round my left flank assured me that it was his intention to hem me against that place and surround me. I felt that not a moment must be lost in retiring to another position.

I had every reason to believe that the enemy's forces were somewhat exhausted, and I knew that they had suffered heavy losses. I hoped, therefore, that his pursuit would not be too vigorous to prevent me effecting my object.

The operation, however, was full of danger and difficulty, not only owing to the very superior force in my front, but also to the exhaustion of the troops.

The retirement was recommenced in the early morning of the 25th to a position in the neighbourhood of

Le Cateau, and rearguards were ordered to be clear of the Maubeuge—Bavai—Eth road by 5.30 a.m.

Two Cavalry Brigades, with the Divisional Cavalry of the Second Corps, covered the movement of the Second Corps. The remainder of the Cavalry Division with the 19th Brigade, the whole under the command of General Allenby, covered the west flank.

The 4th Division commenced its detrainment at Le Cateau on Sunday, the 23rd, and by the morning of the 25th eleven battalions and a Brigade of Artillery with Divisional Staff were available for service.

I ordered General Snow to move out to take up a position with his right south of Solesmes, his left resting on the Cambrai—Le Cateau road south of La Chaprie. In this position the Division rendered great help to the effective retirement of the Second and First Corps to the new position.

Although the troops had been ordered to occupy the Cambrai—Le Cateau—Landrecies position, and the ground had, during the 25th, been partially prepared and entrenched, I had grave doubts—owing to the information I received as to the accumulating strength of the enemy against me—as to the wisdom of standing there to fight.

Having regard to the continued retirement of the French on my right, my exposed left flank, the tendency of the enemy's western corps (II.) to envelop me, and, more than all, the exhausted condition of the troops, I determined to make a great effort to continue the retreat till I could put some substantial obstacle, such as the Somme or the Oise, between my troops and the enemy, and afford the former some opportunity of rest and reorganisation. Orders were, therefore, sent to the Corps Commanders to continue their retreat as soon as they possibly could towards the general line Vermand—St. Quentin—Ribemont.

The Cavalry, under General Allenby, were ordered to cover the retirement.

Appendix I

The Guards at Landrecies

Throughout the 25th and far into the evening, the First Corps continued its march on Landrecies, following the road along the eastern border of the Forêt de Mormal, and arrived at Landrecies about 10 o'clock. I had intended that the Corps should come farther west so as to fill up the gap between Le Cateau and Landrecies, but the men were exhausted and could not get farther in without rest.

The enemy, however, would not allow them this rest, and about 9.30 p.m. a report was received that the 4th Guards Brigade in Landrecies was heavily attacked by troops of the 9th German Army Corps who were coming through the forest on the north of the town. This brigade fought most gallantly and caused the enemy to suffer tremendous loss in issuing from the forest into the narrow street of the town. The loss has been estimated from reliable sources at from 700 to 1,000. At the same time information reached me from Sir Douglas Haig that his 1st Division was also heavily engaged south and east of Maroilles. I sent urgent messages to the Commander of the two French Reserve Divisions on my right to come up to the assistance of the First Corps, which they eventually did. Partly owing to this assistance, but mainly to the skilful manner in which Sir Douglas Haig extricated his Corps from an exceptionally difficult position in the darkness of the night, they were able at dawn to resume their march south towards Wessigny on Guise.

By about 6 p.m. the Second Corps had got into position with their right on Le Cateau, their left in the neighbourhood of Caudry, and the line of defence was continued thence by the 4th Division towards Seranvillers, the left being thrown back.

During the fighting on the 24th and 25th the Cavalry became a good deal scattered, but by the early morning of the 26th General Allenby had suc-

ceeded in concentrating two brigades to the south of Cambrai.

The 4th Division was placed under the orders of the General Officer Commanding the Second Army Corps.

Wednesday, August 26

On the 24th the French Cavalry Corps, consisting of three divisions, under General Sordêt, had been in billets north of Avesnes. On my way back from Bavai, which was my "Poste de Commandement" during the fighting of the 23rd and 24th, I visited General Sordêt, and earnestly requested his co-operation and support. He promised to obtain sanction from his Army Commander to act on my left flank, but said that his horses were too tired to move before the next day. Although he rendered me valuable assistance later on in the course of the retirement, he was unable for the reasons given to afford me any support on the most critical day of all, viz., the 26th.

At daybreak it became apparent that the enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of the position occupied by the Second Corps and the 4th Division.

At this time the guns of four German Army Corps were in position against them, and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien reported to me that he judged it impossible to continue his retirement at daybreak (as ordered) in face of such an attack.

I sent him orders to use his utmost endeavours to break off the action and retire at the earliest possible moment, as it was impossible for me to send him any support, the First Corps being at the moment incapable of movement.

The French Cavalry Corps, under General Sordêt, was coming up on our left rear early in the morning, and I sent an urgent message to him to do his utmost to come up and support the retirement of my left flank; but,

owing to the fatigue of his horses he found himself unable to intervene in any way.

There had been no time to entrench the position properly, but the troops showed a magnificent front to the terrible fire which confronted them.

The Artillery, although outmatched by at least four to one, made a splendid fight, and inflicted heavy losses on their opponents.

At length it became apparent that, if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted ; and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 p.m. The movement was covered with the most devoted intrepidity and determination by the Artillery, which had itself suffered heavily, and the fine work done by the Cavalry in the further retreat from the position assisted materially in the final completion of this most difficult and dangerous operation.

Fortunately the enemy had himself suffered too heavily to engage in an energetic pursuit.

I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the valuable services rendered by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of the 26th August could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operations.

The retreat was continued far into the night of the 26th and through the 27th and 28th, on which date the troops halted on the line Noyon—Chauny—La Fère, having then thrown off the weight of the enemy's pursuit.

On the 27th and 28th I was much indebted to General Sordêt and the French Cavalry Division which

he commands for materially assisting my retirement and successfully driving back some of the enemy on Cambrai.

General D'Amade also, with the 61st and 62nd French Reserve Divisions, moved down from the neighbourhood of Arras on the enemy's right flank and took much pressure off the rear of the British Forces.

This closes the period covering the heavy fighting which commenced at Mons on Sunday afternoon, 23rd August, and which really constituted a four days' battle.

At this point, therefore, I propose to close the present despatch.

I deeply deplore the very serious losses which the British Forces have suffered in this great battle; but they were inevitable in view of the fact that the British Army—only two days after a concentration by rail—was called upon to withstand a vigorous attack of five German Army Corps.

It is impossible for me to speak too highly of the skill evinced by the two General Officers commanding Army Corps; the self-sacrificing and devoted exertions of their Staffs; the direction of the troops by Divisional, Brigade, and Regimental Leaders; the command of the smaller units by their officers; and the magnificent fighting spirit displayed by non-commissioned officers and men.

I wish particularly to bring to your Lordship's notice the admirable work done by the Royal Flying Corps under Sir David Henderson. Their skill, energy, and perseverance have been beyond all praise. They have furnished me with the most complete and accurate information which has been of incalculable value in the conduct of the operations. Fired at constantly both by friend and foe, and not hesitating to fly in every kind of weather, they have remained undaunted throughout.

Further, by actually fighting in the air, they have succeeded in destroying five of the enemy's machines.

I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the incal-

culable assistance I received from the General and Personal Staffs at Headquarters during this trying period.

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, Chief of the General Staff; Major-General Wilson, Sub-Chief of the General Staff; and all under them have worked day and night unceasingly with the utmost skill, self-sacrifice, and devotion; and the same acknowledgment is due by me to Brigadier-General Hon. W. Lambton, my Military Secretary, and the Personal Staff.

In such operations as I have described, the work of the Quartermaster-General is of an extremely onerous nature. Major-General Sir William Robertson has met what appeared to be almost insuperable difficulties with his characteristic energy, skill, and determination; and it is largely owing to his exertions that the hardships and sufferings of the troops—inseparable from such operations—were not much greater.

Major-General Sir Nevil Macready, the Adjutant-General, has also been confronted with most onerous and difficult tasks in connection with disciplinary arrangements and the preparation of casualty lists. He has been indefatigable in his exertions to meet the difficult situations which arose.

I have not yet been able to complete the list of officers whose names I desire to bring to your Lordship's notice for services rendered during the period under review; and, as I understand it is of importance that this despatch should no longer be delayed, I propose to forward this list, separately, as soon as I can.

I have the honour to be,
Your Lordship's most obedient Servant,

(Signed) J. D. P. FRENCH, Field-Marshal,
Commander-in-Chief,
British Forces in the Field.

Appendix I

17th September, 1914.

My Lord,

In continuation of my despatch of September 7th, I have the honour to report the further progress of the operations of the Forces under my command from August 28th.

On that evening the retirement of the Force was followed closely by two of the enemy's cavalry columns, moving south-east from St. Quentin.

Saturday, August 29

The retreat in this part of the field was being covered by the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades. South of the Somme General Gough, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, threw back the Uhlans of the Guard with considerable loss.

General Chetwode, with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, encountered the eastern column near Cérizy, moving south. The Brigade attacked and routed the column, the leading German regiment suffering very severe casualties and being almost broken up.

The 7th French Army Corps was now in course of being railed up from the south to the east of Amiens. On the 29th it nearly completed its detrainment, and the French 6th Army got into position on my left, its right resting on Roye.

The 5th French Army was behind the line of the Oise between La Fère and Guise.

The pursuit of the enemy was very vigorous; some five or six German corps were on the Somme facing the 5th Army on the Oise. At least two corps were advancing towards my front, and were crossing the Somme east and west of Ham. Three or four more German corps were opposing the 6th French Army on my left.

This was the situation at 1 o'clock on the 29th, when I received a visit from General Joffre at my headquarters.

I strongly represented my position to the French Commander-in-Chief, who was most kind, cordial, and

sympathetic, as he has always been. He told me that he had directed the 5th French Army on the Oise to move forward and attack the Germans on the Somme, with a view to checking pursuit. He also told me of the formation of the Sixth French Army on my left flank, composed of the 7th Army Corps, four Reserve Divisions, and Sordêt's Corps of Cavalry.

I finally arranged with General Joffre to effect a further short retirement towards the line Compiègne—Soissons, promising him, however, to do my utmost to keep always within a day's march of him.

In pursuance of this arrangement the British Forces retired to a position a few miles north of the line Compiègne—Soissons on the 29th.

Change of Base

The right flank of the German Army was now reaching a point which appeared seriously to endanger my line of communications with Havre. I had already evacuated Amiens, into which place a German reserve division was reported to have moved.

Orders were given to change the base to St. Nazaire, and establish an advance base at Le Mans. This operation was well carried out by the Inspector-General of Communications.

In spite of a severe defeat inflicted upon the Guard 10th and Guard Reserve Corps of the German Army by the 1st and 3rd French Corps on the right of the 5th Army, it was not part of General Joffre's plan to pursue this advantage, and a general retirement on to the line of the Marne was ordered, to which the French forces in the more eastern theatre were directed to conform.

A new Army (the 9th) had been formed from three corps in the south by General Joffre, and moved into the space between the right of the 5th and left of the 4th Armies.

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Whilst closely adhering to his strategic conception to draw the enemy on at all points until a favourable situation was created from which to assume the offensive, General Joffre found it necessary to modify from day to day the methods by which he sought to attain this object, owing to the development of the enemy's plans and changes in the general situation.

In conformity with the movements of the French Forces, my retirement continued practically from day to day. Although we were not severely pressed by the enemy, rearguard actions took place continually.

South of Compiègne

On the 1st September, when retiring from the thickly wooded country to the south of Compiègne, the 1st Cavalry Brigade was overtaken by some German cavalry. They momentarily lost a Horse Artillery battery, and several officers and men were killed and wounded. With the help, however, of some detachments from the 3rd Corps operating on their left, they not only recovered their own guns, but succeeded in capturing twelve of the enemy's.

Similarly, to the eastward, the 1st Corps, retiring south, also got into some very difficult forest country, and a somewhat severe rearguard action ensued at Villers-Cotterets, in which the 4th Guards Brigade suffered considerably.

On September 3rd the British Forces were in position south of the Marne between Lagny and Signy-Signets. Up to this time I had been requested by General Joffre to defend the passages of the river as long as possible, and to blow up the bridges in my front. After I had made the necessary dispositions, and the destruction of the bridges had been effected, I was asked by the French Commander-in-Chief to continue my retirement to a point some 12 miles in rear of the position I then occupied, with a view to taking up a second position behind

the Seine. This retirement was duly carried out. In the meantime the enemy had thrown bridges and crossed the Marne in considerable force, and was threatening the Allies all along the line of the British Forces and the 5th and 9th French Armies. Consequently several small outpost actions took place.

Saturday, September 5

On Saturday, September 5th, I met the French Commander-in-Chief at his request, and he informed me of his intention to take the offensive forthwith, as he considered conditions were very favourable to success.

General Joffre announced to me his intention of wheeling up the left flank of the 6th Army, pivoting on the Marne and directing it to move on the Ourcq ; cross and attack the flank of the 1st German Army, which was then moving in a south-easterly direction east of that river.

The Advance

He requested me to effect a change of front to my right—my left resting on the Marne, and my right on the 5th Army—to fill the gap between that army and the 6th. I was then to advance against the enemy in my front and join in the general offensive movement.

These combined movements practically commenced on Sunday, September 6th, at sunrise ; and on that day it may be said that a great battle opened on a front extending from Ermenonville, which was just in front of the left flank of the 6th French Army, through Lizy on the Marne, Mauperthuis, which was about the British centre, Courtecon, which was the left of the 5th French Army, to Esternay and Charleville, the left of the 9th Army under General Foch, and so along the front of the 9th, 4th, and 3rd French Armies to a point north of the fortress of Verdun.

This battle, in so far as the 6th French Army, the

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British Army, the 5th French Army, and the 9th French Army were concerned, may be said to have concluded on the evening of September 10th, by which time the Germans had been driven back to the line Soissons—Reims, with a loss of thousands of prisoners, many guns, and enormous masses of transport.

About the 3rd September the enemy appears to have changed his plans and to have determined to stop his advance South direct upon Paris; for on the 4th September air reconnaissances showed that his main columns were moving in a south-easterly direction generally east of a line drawn through Nanteuil and Lizy on the Ourcq.

On the 5th September several of these columns were observed to have crossed the Marne; whilst German troops, which were observed moving south-east up the left bank of the Ourcq on the 4th, were now reported to be halted and facing that river. Heads of the enemy's columns were seen crossing at Changis, La Ferté, Nogent, Château Thierry, and Mezy.

Considerable German columns of all arms were seen to be converging on Montmirail, whilst before sunset large bivouacs of the enemy were located in the neighbourhood of Coulommiers, south of Rebais, La Ferté-Gaucher, and Dagny.

I should conceive it to have been about noon on the 6th September, after the British Forces had changed their front to the right and occupied the line Jouy-Le Chatel—Faremoutiers—Villeneuve La Comte, and the advance of the 6th French Army north of the Marne towards the Ourcq became apparent, that the enemy realised the powerful threat that was being made against the flank of his columns moving south-east, and began the great retreat which opened the battle above referred to.

Here follows the account of the Battle of the Marne.

APPENDIX II

ORDER OF THE DAY

AUGUST 29TH, 1914.

Issued to the Troops under his command by the General Officer Commanding the Second Corps.

As it is improbable the troops of the 2nd Army Corps understand the operations of the last few days, commencing on the 21st instant with the advance to the line of the Mons Canal and ending with a retirement to our present position on the River Oise about Noyon, the Commander of the Corps desires to let troops know that the object was to delay the advance of a far superior force of the enemy to enable our Allies to conduct operations elsewhere. This object, owing to the skilful handling of the Commanders of units and the magnificent fighting spirit shown by all ranks against overwhelming odds, and in spite of very heavy casualties, was achieved, and the French Army is now reported to be advancing.

That the losses were not greater in the retirement from the Hancourt—Caudry—Beaumont—Le Cateau position on the 26th instant is due largely to the support given by French troops, chiefly General Sordêt's Cavalry Corps, operating on the West flank of the British troops, and we may well be thankful to our gallant comrades in arms.

General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, whilst regretting the terribly heavy casualties and the weary forced marches,

in which it has been impossible to distribute the necessary amount of food, begs to thank all ranks and to express his admiration of the grand fighting and determined spirit shown by all ranks, and his pride in being allowed to command such a splendid force.

He is sure that whenever it is thought necessary to again assume the offensive the troops will be as pleased as he will himself.

The following messages have been received from the Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir John French, to publish to the troops of the 2nd Army Corps—the first dated 25th August.

(1)

"*Special Army Order.*

"I have received the following telegram from the Secretary of State for War:

"'London, 25–8–14.

"'Congratulate troops on their splendid work. We are all proud as usual of them.'

"In making this message known to the troops under my command, I wish to express to them my heartfelt thanks for, and my profound admiration of, their magnificent bearing and conduct during the fighting of the last two days.

"The most difficult operation which an army can be called upon to carry out was rendered necessary by the general strategic situation of the allied forces extending over an enormous front.

"I can only tell you that it was most brilliantly and successfully performed. This happy result was entirely due to the splendid spirit, efficient training, and magnificent discipline of regimental officers and men, and the fine skill displayed by the higher commanders in the direction of the troops."

Appendix II

(2)

"28th August, 1914.

"A a 67. Following message from Lord Kitchener to C.-in-C. will be communicated to all troops. Begins: 'The First Lord asks me to transmit to you the following message from the Home Fleet:—"The officers and men of the Grand Fleet wish to express to their comrades of the Army admiration of the magnificent stand made against great odds, and wish them the brilliant success which the Fleet feels sure awaits their further efforts."' Ends."

(3)

"No. 28 G. Following from Lord Kitchener to C.-in-C. Begins: 'Your F 37. Your troops have done marvellously well under their Commanders during severe attacks which they have had to withstand practically alone. Express to them all the thanks of the King and Government.' Ends."

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COUNTRY FROM MONS TO PARIS

MAP OF COUNTRY FROM MONS TO PARIS