GEORGE HERBERT PERRIS

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

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Содержание

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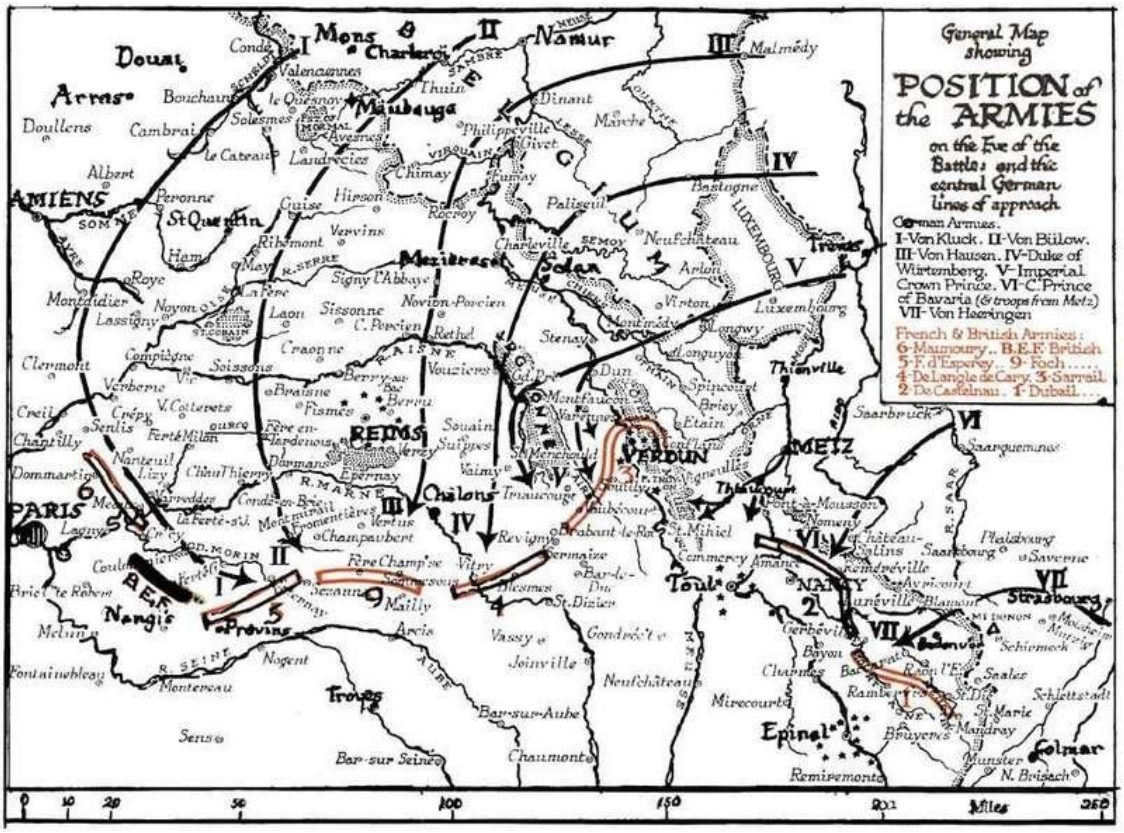

General Map showing

POSITION of the ARMIES on the Eve of the Battle, and the central German lines of approach.

German Armies.

I–Von Kluck. **II**–Von Bülow. **III**–Von Hausen. **IV**–Duke of Würtemberg. **V**–Imperial Crown Prince. **VI**–C. Prince of Bavaria (& troops from Metz). **VII**–Von Heeringen.

French & British Armies:

6–Marmoury. **B.E.F.** British.

5–F. d'Espérey. **9**–Foch.

4–DeLangle de Cary. **3**–Sarrail.

2–DeCastelnau. **1**–Dubail.

PREFACE

The great war has entered into history. The restraints, direct and indirect, which it imposed being gone with it, we return to sounder tests of what should be public knowledge—uncomfortable truths may be told, secret places explored. At the same time, the first squall of controversy in France over the opening of the land campaign in the West has subsided; this lull is the student's opportunity. No complete history of the events culminating in the victory of the Marne is yet possible, or soon to be expected. On the German side, evidence is scanty and of low value; on that of the Allies, there is yet a preliminary work of sifting and measuring to undertake ere definitive judgments can be set down. Any narrative conceived in a scientific, not an apologetic or romantic, spirit may claim to further this end.

The difficulty lies less in following the actual movements of that great encounter—the most important of which, and their part in the result, can now be traced pretty accurately—than in estimating the factors that produced and moulded it. Yet, if we are right in holding the battle of the Marne to be essentially the completion of a chapter, the resultant of certain designs and certain misadventures, a vast strategical reversal and correction, such an estimate is necessary to the subject. How did the two chief antagonists envisage the process of modern warfare? Why was the action which was to close the first phase of the war, and largely to shape its after-course, fought not near the northern or eastern frontiers, but between Paris and Verdun? Why and how were the original plans of campaign modified to reach this result? What conditions of victory existed on the Marne that had been lacking on the Sambre? In a word, the key to the meaning of the battle must be sought in the character of the forces in play, their comparative numbers, organisation, and training, armament and equipment, leadership and inspiration.

No sooner is such an inquiry opened than a number of derivative problems appear. Where exactly lay the German superiority of force at the outset, and why was it not maintained? Was the first French concentration justifiable? If not, was it promptly and soundly changed? Could the northern frontier have been defended? Was Lanrezac responsible for Charleroi, and, if so, why not Castelnau for Morhange? Was the German plan of envelopment exaggerated? Could the British have done more at Mons, and were they slow and timorous when the hour arrived to turn about? Was Paris ever in danger? And, coming to the battle itself, how was it decided? What parts did Gallieni, Von Kluck, Sir John French, and Foch play? Was Joffre really master of the field? It may be too soon to answer fully such questions as these; it is too late to evade them.

Outside the mass of official and semi-official bulletins, dispatches, and explanations, much of it now best left to oblivion, a considerable literature has accumulated in France, including personal narratives by combatants of all arms, and critical essays from points of view the most diverse. With the rather cruel sincerity of the French intelligence, the whole military preparation of the Republic has been challenged; and, in the consequent discussion, many important facts have come to light. Thus, we have the texts of the most decisive orders, and many details of the dispositions of troops. We have Marshal Von Bülow's valuable diary of field movements, and the critical reflections of distinguished officers like Lt.-Col. de Thomasson, Generals Malleterre, Berthaut, Verraux, Percin, Canonge, Bonnal, Palat, Cherfils, and Col. Feyler. Fragmentary statements by General Joffre himself, by Generals Foch, Lanrezac, and Maunoury, the Ministers of War, MM. Messimy and Millerand, by Generals von Freytag-Loringhoven, Von Kluck, and other German officers and men, give useful indications. We are also indebted to the more systematic works of MM. Hanotaux, Reinach, Engerand, and Babin; and, with regard to the British Force, the volumes of Marshal French and Major-General Maurice are important. These and other sources are cited in the pages of "Notes and References" at the end of the volume, in which some questions of detail, especially relating to the preparation of the battle, are discussed.

Having been privileged to watch the war in France from beginning to end, and to live with the French armies (as Correspondent attached to General Headquarters) for more than two years, the writer has also had exceptional opportunities of studying the terrain, and of discussing the drama as a whole and in detail with officers and men from the highest to the most humble. To name all those from whom he has received aid would be impossible; to name any might seem to associate them with conclusions for which he is solely responsible; but he may record his deep gratitude to the French Government, the Headquarters Staff, and the various Army Staffs, for the rare experience of which this volume is unworthy fruit.

February 1920.

CHAPTER I
THE DELUGE

August 25, 1914: three weeks after Von Emmich opened the war before Liège; five days after the French Army of Lorraine was trapped at Sarrebourg and Morhange; two days after Namur fell, and Charleroi and Mons were abandoned.

On this black day, the 25th, while Louvain was burning, the 80,000 men of the old British regular Army made an average of 20 miles under a brazen sun, pursued by the enormous mass of Von Kluck's marching wing. The 1st Corps under Haig came into Landrecies at 10 p.m., and, after a stiff fight and two or three hours' sleep, trudged on to Guise; while the 2nd, Smith-Dorrien's, at Le Cateau and towards Cambrai, spent most of a showery night in preparing for the battle of the morrow, which was to save the western flank of the Allies. On the British right, the French 5th Army, Lanrezac's, surprised in the Charleroi–Namur–Dinant triangle by the onset of Von Bülow and the cleverly secreted approach of Von Hausen, had struck a wild blow, and then reeled back; the two German commanders were now driving it over the Belgian frontier from Avesnes to Rocroi. The 4th Army, under de Langle de Cary, no less heavily punished between Paliseul and Neufchateau in the Belgian Ardennes, was just reaching the French Meuse between Sedan and Stenay, there to dispute the passages against the Duke of Würtemberg. Eastward again, Ruffey, beaten back on a wide crescent from Virton to Briey in the Woevre by the Imperial Crown Prince, was standing better against a relaxed pressure, from toward Montmédy, through Spincourt, to Etain. Thus, Sarrail, in taking over the command of the 3rd Army, was able to make ready, though with inadequate means, for the three-sided defence of Verdun. On the eastern border, Castelnau and Dubail, withdrawing hardly from ill-starred adventures in Lorraine and Alsace, were rallying the 2nd and 1st Armies around the Nancy hills and on both sides of the Gap of Charmes. Mulhouse, twice captured, was finally abandoned by General Pau, with all save a corner of Alsace and the southern passes of the Vosges. "It is a cruel necessity," said the official communiqué of August 26, "which the Army of Alsace and its chief have submitted to with pain, and only at the last extremity." They had discovered that "the decisive attack" had to be met "in the north." At that moment, in fact, a hardly less "decisive" attack was being met in the heart of Lorraine.

It was everywhere the same bitter story of defeat—defeat by surprise, by locally superior numbers, by superior armament, sometimes by superior generalship; and everywhere the retreat was accompanied and hampered by the flight of masses of peasantry and townsfolk whose flaming homes lit upon the horizon behind a warning to hasten their feeble steps.

Before we seek the Staffs in their shifting quarters, to explain this extraordinary situation, let us see what it meant for the commonalty of the armies, without whose strength and confidence the best plans must be as chaff in the wind. Over a million strong, they had left their homes, and gathered at their depots during these three weeks, to be whirled off to the frontiers and the first scarcely imaginable trial of modern conscript systems. It was a new thing in the world's history, this sudden tremendous clash of the whole manhood of highly developed nations, armed with the most murderous machinery science could devise, and supported by vast reserves of wealth. It had fallen swiftly upon them, the doom that many learned men had declared to be impossible in the twentieth century; yet its essential nature was crude enough to be immediately understood, and the intelligence of France, though shocked, was not stunned. This million of peasants and workmen, merchants, manufacturers, priests, artists, idlers, and the nation behind them, were unanimous as never before. They knew the issue was not of their making; they knew equally that it could not be refused, but must be fought out, and that it would be a hard fight. The Napoleonic wars were to be eclipsed; and there was now no

Little Corporal to flash his genius like a searchlight across Europe. The enemy had no less advantage in prestige than in effectives, preparation, initiative.

Few of the million guessed, as yet, that most of them were marked down for sacrifice. The general opinion was that it would be all over by Christmas, at latest. A four months' war seemed tragic enough in those first days. With the unwonted agreement, an unwonted gravity spread across the sunny lands from the Channel to the Alps where the crops were ripening. If international idealism lay shattered, national democracy rose well to the trial—never better. No recrimination (even the murderer of Jaurès was set aside), no conspiracy, no guillotine, marked the great revival of the republican spirit. England would at least guard the coasts, and keep the seaways open. France went into the struggle without wavering or doubt.

And so, "Aux armes, Citoyens!"—for these, mark you, are, in very fact, citizen armies, independent, free-thinking, high-spirited fellows, no Emperor's "cannon-food." From the smallest hamlet to the boulevards of the great city, every pulse of life is feverishly concentrated upon their gathering and departure. At the barracks the reservists, clad, armed, equipped, are ready to entrain. Crowds of women, whose red eyes belie their brave words, children at their skirts, surround the gates, and run forward with bunches of flowers and tricolor rosettes. The officers carry bouquets at their saddle-bows, the men cap their rifles with roses and ribbons. At the railway station, long lines of goods-vans, with a few passenger carriages; more flowers and little flags; allied colours in front of the engine; a wag chalks up the direction: "*Berlin, aller et retour.*" The horses and guns are aboard; the men jostle in the open doorways, and exchange cries with the crowd. A stanza of the "Marseillaise" is broken by last adieux, shouts of "Vive la France!" and the curtain falls upon the first memorable act.

Interminable journeys follow, by road and rail, toward the frontiers, then from town to village, and from farm to farm of countrysides more and more deserted and desolate. In the passes of the Vosges, the hills and flats of Lorraine, the woods of the French Ardennes, the men accustom themselves uneasily to the oppressive heat of day and the chill and damp of night; to sore feet and chafed shoulders; to spells of hunger due to late or lost convoys; to the deprivation of accustomed comfort, and the thousand minor ills which in all times have been the ground-stuff of the showy tapestries of war. Superfluous graces of civilised life vanish before the irreconcilable need of economy in every effort. Officers begin to be honoured not for rank or show, but for the solid talents of leadership; pals are chosen, not from effusion of heart, but for assurance of help in emergency.

The mantles of the chasseurs are still blue, the breeches of the infantry red, the uniforms of the artillery and engineers nearly black; but already bright colours tend to disappear, and every other tone to assimilate with the dust of the high roads. By day and night there is but one traffic throughout these northern and eastern departments—files of cavalry, batteries of field-guns, columns of heavy-laden men, convoys of Parisian autobuses and hooded carts, pass incessantly through the silent forests out into the open plains. The civilian population steadily diminishes, even in the larger towns; the gendarmerie keep those who remain under suspicion of espionage. The frontier villagers welcome the marching troops hospitably, until local food supplies are exhausted, and until news comes in from the front of reverses and of foul cruelty to the peasants on the part of the enemy. Only a fortnight has gone by when the national confidence in a speedy victory receives this heavy blow. Bad news gathers and reverberates. It is a little difficult, after years of bloodshed, to recover the fresh sense of these first calamities. Men were then not yet broken to the pains, the abominable spectacles, of war. That their self-offering to the fatherland should win them an honoured grave might well be. But defeat at the outset, the shame of retreat almost before a blow could be struck, this was an incredible, monstrous, intolerable thing.

The incredible, however, generalised itself over all the highways of Lorraine and Belgium. Take any typical scene on the march-routes of August 22 or the following days.[1] The roads are black

[1] Many volumes of soldiers' notes and recollections have been published, and some of them have high literary merit. One of these

with columns of troops retreating west- and south-ward, more or less broken, linesmen, chasseurs, artillerymen, supply and special services, with their guns, munition wagons, Red Cross detachments, convoys of heavy-laden carts with wounded men sitting on top or clinging behind; and, in the breaks, crowds of panic-stricken peasants, in farm wagons or on foot, old men, women, and children, with bedding, boxes, bird-cages, and other strange belongings. Dismay broods like a palpable cloud over these pitiful processions. There is an incessant jostling. Drivers flog their horses cruelly. Wounded men drop by the wayside and lie there untended, their haggard faces stained with mire and powder, blood oozing through their coats, trickling out into the litter of torn knapsacks and broken arms. The sun blazes inexorably, the air is poisoned with clouds of dust, or drenching showers of rain produce another sort of misery; and ever the long stream of failure and fear flows on, eddying here and there into acute confusion as some half-mad woman sets up a cry: "The Prussians!"

Night follows day: soldiers and country-folk, hungry and exhausted, fall into the corners of any sheltered place they can find—an empty barn, the nave of a village church—for an unsatisfying sleep, or, too sick to sleep, watch the fantastic shadows and fugitive lights dancing upon the walls, mocking their anguished thoughts of the morrow. The batteries and convoys have gone on through the darkness, men rolling from side to side with fatigue on their horses or gun-carriages, as though drunk. With daybreak the greater trek recommences. The enemy has not been idle: in the distance behind rolls the thunder of heavy guns; pillars of smoke and flame rise from burning villages. And as, day after day, a new stage of retirement—increasingly controlled, it is true—is ordered, the question pierces deeper: What is to become of France?

Those who have lived at the centre as well as on the skirts of armed hosts become habituated to one enveloping condition: the rank and file, and even most of the officers, know little or nothing

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is *Ma Pièce, Souvenirs d'un Canonnier* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit), by Sergeant Paul Lintier, of the 44th Artillery, who shared in the defeat of Ruffey's Army near Virton, in the south-eastern corner of Belgium, 35 miles north of Verdun. It was almost his first sight of bloodshed, and with an artist's truthfulness he records all the confusion of his mind."The battle is lost," he writes on August 23, "I know not how or why. I have seen nothing. It is a sheer nightmare. We shall be massacred.... Anguish chokes me.... This boiling mass of animality and thought that is my life is about to cease. My bleeding body will be stretched upon the field. I see it. Across the sunny perspective of the future a great curtain falls. I am only twenty-one years old.... What are we waiting for? Why do not our guns fire? I perspire, I am afraid … afraid."This mood gradually passes away. A few days later he is trying to explain the change: "One accustoms oneself to danger as to the cruellest privations, or the uncertainty of the morrow. I used to wonder, before the war, how the aged could live in quietude before the immanence of death. Now I understand. For ourselves, the risk of death has become an element of daily existence. One counts with it; it no longer astonishes, and frightens us less. And, besides, every day trains us to courage. The conscious and continuous effort to master oneself succeeds at length. This is the whole of military bravery. One is not born brave; one becomes so." And this stoicism is softened and spiritualised by a new sense of what the loss of France would mean.Another notable narrative of this period of the war is *Ce qu'a vu un Officier de Chasseurs-à-Pied* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit), by Henri Libermann, The writer was engaged on the Belgian frontier farther west, near where the Semoy falls out of the Ardennes into the Meuse, the region where the Saxons and the IV Army joined hands on the one side, and, on the other, the 5th French Army, Lanrezac's, touched all too lightly the 4th, that of de Langle de Cary. Some French officers have quartered themselves in an old convent, picturesquely set upon a wooded hill. They do not know it, but, in fact, the cause is already lost from Dinant to Neufchâteau. All they know is that a part of the 9th Corps is in action a few miles to the north. The guns can be heard; the villagers are flying in panic; the flames of burning buildings redden the northern sky."In the convent parlour, the table is laid with a fine white cloth, decorated with flowers, bottles covered with venerable dust, cakes whose golden crust gladdens the eyes. A brilliant Staff, the Commandant, a few chasseur officers. The Sisters hurry about, carrying dishes. 'A little more fowl, my dear Commandant,' says the Brigadier; 'really, it is delicious. And this wine—Pontet-Canet of '74, if you please!' All of us are grateful to the good Sisters, who are such delicate cooks. At dessert, as though embarrassed by an unhappy impression shared by all the guests, the General speaks: 'Rest tranquil, gentlemen. Our attack to-morrow morning will be overwhelming. Debouching between hills 832 and 725, it will take in flank the German Corps which is stopping our brave 9th, and will determine the victory."Hardly has the toast of the morrow's triumph been drunk than a heavy step is heard outside, the click of spurs, and then a knock on the door. A captain enters, in helmet and breastplate, a bloody bandage across his forehead, dust thick upon his uniform, perspiration rolling down his face. He has ridden from Dinant with news of the defeat, and secret instructions. The Uhlans are near. Nevertheless, the officers go to bed. During the night they are aroused by an increasing clamour of flying peasants outside the convent. There are soldiers among them, wildly crying: "The Prussians are coming, *sauve qui peut*!" An infantry regiment had camped, the previous evening, in the village of Willerzie. "They arrived late, tired out. No thought but of rest, no scouts or outposts. On the verge of the neighbouring forest, grey-coated horsemen appeared. The sentinels fired a few shots, and they retired into the wood. The regiment then went to sleep in its false security. About 11 p.m., however, three searchlights flashed along the village streets. '*Schnell, schnell! Vorwärts, vorwärts!*' A terrible fusillade broke out around the houses; and, as our infantrymen, hurriedly wakened, ran to arms, a thick rain of bullets fell upon them. In a few instants, terror was transformed into panic, panic into rout. At this moment the regiment was flying, dispersed in all directions, pursued by the 'hurrahs' of the victorious Germans."

of what is passing outside their own particular spheres. It is in the nature and necessity of military operations, especially at the beginning and in a phase of rapid movement, that it should be so. Perhaps it is also a necessity of the psychology of endurance. Of these republican armies, only a small minority of the men were old soldiers; most of them had all they could do to adapt themselves, day by day and hour by hour, to the new world of violence, squalor, and general unreason in which they were now prisoned. They had to learn to bear fatigue and pain such as they had never known; to overcome the spasm of fear that grips the stoutest heart in unaccustomed emergencies; to thrust the bayonet not into a sandbag, but into soft, quivering flesh, and draw it forth again; to obey men who were incompetent and stupid, as well as born leaders. The German heavy shells, aeroplanes, motor transport, the formidable entrenchments and fields of wire—gradually they recognised these and other elements of the invader's superiority. Weaklings cried: "We are betrayed. It is 1870 over again." What could the bravest reply? Letters were few and far between. Newspapers were never so barren. What was Paris doing? What were Russia and England doing? The retreating columns marched with downcast eyes, wrapped in a moody silence.

By what revolt of the spirit did these apparently broken men become, a fortnight later, the heroes of the Marne? The answer must be that they were not broken, but were passing through the sort of experience which, in a virile race, wakens the dull-minded to their utmost effort, blows away the last traces of laxity and false idealism, and, by setting above every other fear the fear of a ruined Fatherland, rallies the whole mass on the elementary ground of defence to the death. Voices, lying voices, had whispered that France was diseased, body and soul, that the Republic would surely die of its corruptions. We have since discovered the immeasurable strength of democratic communities. Then it was questioned by the few, unsuspected by the many. England and America, even more than France, had outgrown any sort of liking for war. To be driven back to that gross test was a profound surprise. For the quick, proud French mind to find itself suddenly in face of defeat and the threat of conquest was a second and severer shock. The long retreat gave it time to perceive that this calamity arose largely from its own errors, and to re-group its forces in a truer conception of the character of modern warfare. Even Joffre may not have clearly realised this need; great instincts count in the crisis of leadership equally with powerful reasoning. Amid the tramp-tramp of the weary, dust-blinded columns, by the night bivouacs, under the rain of shrapnel and the crash of high explosive, men of the most diverse condition and character, shedding old vanities and new alarms, came down step by cruel step to the fundamental honesty, unity, and resolution of our nature. The mirage of an easy victory vanished; in its place a finer idea rose and rose till the armies saw nothing else: France must live! I may die, or be doomed to a travesty of life; at any price, France must be saved.

So the steel was tempered for the supreme trial.

CHAPTER II
A TRAGEDY OF ERRORS

I. The German Plan of Campaign

"Errors," "vanities"? These words must be justified, however gently, however briefly. To regard the battle of the Marne without reference to the grievous beginnings that led to and shaped it would be to belittle and falsify a subject peculiarly demanding care for true perspective. The battle may be classed as negatively decisive in that it arrested the invasion long enough to enable the Allies to gain an equality of forces, and so to prevent a final German victory; it was only positively decisive in the larger sense that it re-created on a sounder base the military spirit and power of France, which alone among the Western Allies seriously counted in that emergency, and, by giving the army a new direction, the nation a new inspiration, made it possible for them to sustain the long struggle that was to follow. Perilous illusions, military as well as pacifist, were buried beside the Marne. A fashion of thought, a whole school of teaching was quietly sunk in its waters. The French mind rose to its full stature as the nature of the surprise into which it had fallen broke upon it.

This surprise was threefold. In the first place, the German plan of campaign was misconceived. That plan was grandiose in its simplicity. It rested upon a sound sense of the separation of the Allies: their geographical dispersion, which gave the aggressor the advantages famous in the career of Frederick the Great, as in that of Napoleon; the diversity of character, power, and interest within the Entente, which was, indeed, hardly more than an improvisation, without any sort of common organ, so far; its lack of unity not only in command but in military theory and practice generally. The first of these data indicated to the German Command the Frederician succession of swift offensives; the second narrowed the choice for the first effort, and suggested an after-work of political intrigue; the third had fortified Prussian pride and discipline with a daring strategy and an armament superior, in most respects, to anything the rest of the world had conceived to be possible. Which of the three great States, then, should be first struck down? The wildest Pan-Germanist could not reply "England," in face of her overwhelming sea-power. So the British Empire, with the North Sea and Channel coasts, were, for the moment, ignored. Its internal problems, its peaceful, almost neutral, temper, its slow-mindedness in European affairs, were more regarded than the trivial military force which alone England could at once offer its friends. For speed was to be of the essence of the plan. Remained France and Russia; and here political as well as military calculations entered. The inchoate Empire of the East would, it was thought, be the slower in getting to its feet. Would a new Moscow expedition break its will for self-defence? The author of the "Willy-Nicky" letters imagined a better way. France would stand by her ally. The "Republic of the Rochettes and Steinheils," however, was not naturally impregnable; when it was finished, would not "dear Nicky" be glad to return to the Drei-Kaiserbund, the old Bismarckian order, and to join in a friendly rearrangement of the world? So the conclusion, with all the neatness of a professorial thesis: Russia was to be held up—actively, on the south, by the Austro-Hungarian armies, passively on the north, by a screen of German troops—while France, as the principal enemy, was swiftly crushed. Thus far, there should have been no surprise.

It was otherwise with the plan of campaign itself, and there are details that will remain in question till all the archives are opened. Yet this now appears the only plan on which Germany could hope to bring an aggressive war to a successful issue. A repetition of the triumph of 1870 would not be enough, for, if France resisted as long this time, everything would be put in doubt. The blow must be still more swift and overwhelming. To be overwhelming, it must at once reach not portions, but the chief mass, of the French armies. But nowhere in the world had military art, working upon a

favourable terrain, set up so formidable a series of obstacles to grand-scale manœuvre as along the line of the Meuse and Moselle Heights and the Vosges. A piercing of this line at the centre, between the fortified systems of Verdun–Toul on the north and Epinal–Belfort on the south, might be an important contributory operation; in itself it could not give a speedy decision. A mere diversion by Belgium, in aid of a main attack in Lorraine, would not materially alter this calculation. The full effects of surprise, most important of all factors in a short struggle, could only be expected where the adversary was least prepared, which was certainly across the north. These offensive considerations would be confirmed by a defensive consideration: German Lorraine, also, was so fortified and garrisoned as to be beyond serious fear of invasion. In neither direction could Alsace provide favourable conditions for a great offensive.

The political objects of the war being granted, these arguments would lead to the strategical conclusion: the strongest possible force will be so deployed, on a vast arc stretching from southern Lorraine to Flanders, that its superiority may at once be brought fully into play. The method was a variant drawn from the teaching of Clausewitz and Schlieffen. The "march on Paris" occupied in the plan no such place as it long held in the popular imagination. The analogy of closing pincers has been used to describe the simultaneous onset of seven German armies ranged in a crescent from the Vosges to Brussels; but it is uncertain whether the southern wing was originally intended to participate immediately in the destructive stroke, or whether this purpose followed upon the collapse of the first French offensives. The latter supposition is the more probable; and we may, therefore, rather picture a titanic bolas ending in five loaded cords, of which the two outer ones are the most heavily weighted. These two outer masses were (*a*) Kluck's and Bülow's Armies on the west; (*b*) the Crown Prince of Bavaria's and Heeringen's on the east. Approximately equal, they had very different functions, the road of the one being open, of the other closed; the one, therefore, being essentially offensive, the other provisionally defensive. Between these two masses, there were three lesser forces under Hausen, the Duke of Würtemberg, and the Imperial Crown Prince. While the eastern armies held the French forces as originally concentrated, the western mass, by an immense envelopment, was to converge, and the three inner bodies were to strike direct, toward the north-centre of France—perhaps toward the upper Seine, but there could hardly be a precise objective till the invasion developed[2] —destroying

[2] The question whether the Eastern thrust was integral in the original plan cannot be absolutely determined on the present information; but it is significant that at the outset the German forces on the East were inferior to the French.M. Gabriel Hanotaux (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, November 15, 1916) thinks that the German right, centre, and left were aiming at the region of Troyes, Kluck from the north-west, Prince Ruprecht of Bavaria from the east, and the Imperial Crown Prince from the north. "The direction of the Prince of Bavaria appears from an order seized on the enemy giving as objective Rozelieures, that is to say, the Gap of Charmes; the direction of the Crown Prince is revealed by an order of September 6 giving Dijon as objective for his cavalry."Lt.-General von Freytag-Loringhoven (*Deductions from the World War*. London: Constable. 1918) says: "The intention was to effect an envelopment from two sides. Envelopment by the left wing of the [German] Army was, however, brought to a standstill before the fortifications of the French eastern frontier."A German brochure on the battle of the Marne—*Die Schlachten an der Marne* (Berlin: Mittler & Sohn. 1916), by a "German Staff Officer" who was evidently an eye-witness, and probably a member of the staff either of General von Kluck, or of General von Moltke, chief of the Grand Staff from the beginning of the war till after the battle, says the plan was to rest on the defensive from the Swiss frontier to the Donon, while the mass of the armies rolled the French up south of the Seine, and Reserve and Landwehr Corps advanced to the coast to stop the landing of British troops. "By all human provisions, this plan might have been carried out by the end of September 1914."A French translation of this interesting booklet (*Une Version Allemande de la Marne*. Brussels et Paris: G. Van Oest et Cie. 1917) includes also a critical study by M. Joseph Reinach, a part of which is given to the results of an examination of the maps taken on German dead, wounded, and prisoners in the beginning of the war. These Staff maps fall into four categories, of which three date from the mobilisation or earlier, and so throw light on the original plan of campaign, while one set was distributed at a later date. The former are: (1) sets of maps of Belgium—the whole country—in seventy sheets, reproducing the Belgian "60,000th" Staff map, and dated 1906, another evidence of premeditation. (2) The north-east of France, from the French "80,000" map, with names in French, but explanations in Italian, dated 1910. These had evidently been printed for the use of Italian troops, but, when Italy declared itself neutral, had been distributed to German officers from motives of economy. (3) The north and north-east of France in 87 sheets, *not including Paris*, dated from 1905 to 1908, and distributed to German officers on the eve of the mobilisation. These are based upon the French "80,000" map, with some variations and special markings. They include the whole of the eastern and northern frontiers from Belfort to Dunkirk; the significant thing is their limits on the west and south. On the west they include the regions of Dunkirk, St. Omer, Arras, Amiens, Montdidier and Beauvais, but not those of Calais, Boulogne, Abbeville, and Rouen. At 30 or 40 miles north of Paris, they turn eastward, including the sectors of Soissons and Rheims, but excluding those of

any resistance in their path. The eastern thrust which actually followed appears, on this hypothesis, as an auxiliary operation rather than part of a double envelopment: we shall see that, delivered at the moment when the Allies in the west were being driven in between Le Cateau and Givet, it failed against a successful defence of the only open road of the eastern frontier, the Gap of Charmes, and that it again failed a fortnight later. The other German armies went triumphantly forward. In every part of the field is evident the intention to conceal, even to hold back, the movements of approach, and so to articulate and synchronise them that, when the hour of the decisive general action had arrived, there should be delivered a single, sudden, knock-out blow.

II. The Forces in Play

In every part the German war-machine was designed and fitted to deliver such a blow. Its effective force was the second great element of surprise for the Entente.

It is now clear that, taking the field as a whole, France was not overwhelmed by superior numbers. True, as a French official report says, "the military effort of Germany at the outset of the war surpassed all anticipations"; but the element of surprise lay not in numbers, but in fighting quality and organisation. Of the whole mass mobilised in August 1914, one quarter was sent to the East. The remainder provided, in the last week of August, for employment against Belgium and France, an effective force of about 80 infantry divisions—45 active, 27 reserve, mixed Ersatz brigades presently grouped in 6 divisions, and 4 Landwehr divisions in course of formation,[3] with about 8 divisions of cavalry,—about a million and a half of men, for the most part young, highly trained and disciplined, including 115,000 re-engaged non-commissioned officers (double the strength of the French company cadres). Of the prodigious mass of this west-European force, about a half was directed through Belgium, and—essential fact—nearly a third passed to the west of the Meuse.

The French, on the other hand, admirably served by their railways,[4] put at once into the field 86 divisions (47 active, 25 reserve, 12 Territorial, and 2 Moroccan), of which 66 were at the front, with 7 divisions of cavalry, on the eve of the critical battles of the Sambre and the Gap of Charmes, in the third week of August. Before the battle of the Marne, all French active troops had been withdrawn from the Italian frontier, only a few Territorials being left there. An exact numerical comparison cannot yet be made. It seems certain, however, that, including five British and six Belgian divisions, in the whole field the Allies were not outnumbered. There was no great difference in cavalry.

But there was a vital difference in the infantry organisation, as to which the French Command had been completely deceived. Not only had it failed to foresee the creation of brigades of Ersatz

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Paris and Meaux. They then turn south again, including the Chalôns, Arcis, and Troyes sheets; and the southern limit is the regions of Troyes, Chaumont, and Mirécourt, (4) Finally, there is a set of 41 sheets supplementary to the last named, printed in 1914, and either distributed at a later date, or intended for armies other than those of the first invasion. These included Calais and the Channel coast, Rouen, Paris, Meaux, to the south thereof the regions of the Orleanais, Berry, the Nivernais, including the great manufacturing centre of Le Creusot, the north of Burgundy, Franche Comté, the Jura, and the Swiss frontier from Bâle to near the Lake of Geneva.In his *L'Enigme de Charleroi* (Paris: L'Edition Française Illustrée, 20 Rue de Provence. 1917), M. Hanotaux expresses the belief that, at the outset, the German Command, regarding England as the chief enemy, intended its armies to cross northern Belgium, "straight to the west and the sea, with Dunkirk and Calais as immediate objective," and that the French resistance diverted them from the coastal region. The evidence of the maps appears to the present writer more convincing than the reasoning of M. Hanotaux.

[3] It is not necessary here to state the evidence in detail; but these figures may be accepted as substantially correct. I am indebted to a British authority for criticism and information. Besides the 4 Landwehr Divisions in course of formation during the last days of August, there were a number of Landwehr Brigades, which, however, had no artillery and were not organised for the field. By the first week of September, the XI Corps and Guard Reserve Corps had gone to the Russian front; but the 4 Landwehr Divisions named above had come in as effective. The "Metz Army Detachment" may be counted as adding a division.

[4] The transport of "covering troops" began at 9 p.m. on July 31, and ended at noon on August 3. On the Eastern Railway alone, 538 trains were required. The "transports of concentration," from August 5 to 18, engaged 4300 trains, only a score of which were behind time. After Charleroi, between August 26 and September 3, the removal of three army corps, five infantry divisions, and three cavalry divisions from Lorraine to the Central and Western fronts was effected by 740 trains, while the railways were largely swamped by other military movements and the civilian exodus.

troops (to say nothing of the Landwehr divisions which appeared in September): it had never contemplated the use of reserve formations as troops of shock. In the French Army, the reserve battalions, regiments, and divisions were so many poor relations—inadequate in younger officers and non-coms, insufficiently armed (especially in artillery), insufficiently trained and disciplined, and, accordingly, destined only for lesser tasks. When, as occurred almost at once under pressure of the successful example of the enemy, reserve divisions and groups of divisions had to be thrown into the front line, the homogeneity of the armies and the confidence of their chiefs suffered. Meanwhile, realising a plan initiated in 1913, the German Staff had created 16 army corps of reserves, of which 13 were used on the Western front, where they proved as solid as the regulars, and were given tasks as responsible in all parts of the field. The main mass of attack, therefore, consisted not of 22, but 34, army corps—a difference larger than the strength of the two armies of Kluck and Bülow to which the great enveloping movement was entrusted.[5] Without this supplementary force—the result not of numbers available, but of superior training and organisation—the invasion could hardly have been attempted, or would assuredly have failed. On the other hand, as we shall see, had it been anticipated, the French plan of campaign must have been profoundly modified.

The balance in armament was not less uneven. The French 3-inch field-gun from the first justified the highest expectations of its rapidity and accuracy of fire. But in pieces of heavier weight and longer range the inferiority was flagrant. While Frenchmen had been counting their "75" against heavier but less handy German guns, while they were throwing all the gravamen of the problem of national defence on three-years' service, the enemy was developing a set of instruments which immensely reinforced his man-power. Instead of resting content with light guns, he set himself to make heavier types more mobile. The peace establishment of a German active corps included 160, a French only 120, guns. It was, however, in weight, rather than numbers, that the difference lay. Every German corps had 16 heavy 5·9-inch mortars. The French had no heavy artillery save a few batteries of Rimailho 6·1-inch rapid-fire pieces, and a few fortress cannon. In addition to 642 six-piece batteries of horse and field artillery (3·1-inch field-gun and 4·1-inch light howitzer), the German armies had, in all, before the mobilisation, 400 four-piece batteries of 5·9-inch howitzers and 8·2-inch mortars. The German artillery alone at the outset had aviators to correct their fire. "Thus," says General Malleterre, speaking from experience in the long retreat[6] —"thus is explained the terrible surprise that our troops suffered when they found themselves overwhelmed at the first contact by avalanches of projectiles, fired from invisible positions that our artillery could not reach. For there was this of unexpected in the German attack, that, before the infantry assault, the deployment of units was preceded by showers of shells of all calibres, storms of iron and fire arresting and upsetting our shaken lines."

In air services, in petrol transport, and in the art of field defences, also, the French were outmatched. Aviation was essentially their sport and science; but the army had shown little interest in it, and had made only a beginning in its two main functions—general reconnaissance and the ranging of artillery fire.[7] Thus ill-prepared for a modern large-scale offensive, France had not acquired the

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[5] For fuller explanations on this point, see *Le Revers de 1914 et ses Causes*, by Lt.-Col. de Thomasson (Paris: Berger-Levrault. 1919). Of the volumes published in France up to this date on the first period of the war, this moderate and closely-reasoned essay by an accomplished officer is one of the most valuable.General Verraux (*L'Oeuvre*, June 1, 1919) refers to this weakness and confirms my general conclusion: "Despite the inferior organisation of reserves, with our 25 Active Corps, the 80 corps battalions of reserves, the Belgians and the British, we had, if not a numerical superiority, almost an equality with the German forces, deducting those on the Russian front."M. Victor Giraud, a competent historical writer, in his *Histoire de la Grande Guerre* (Part I. ch. iii. Paris: Hachette. 1919) gives other details, leading to the same conclusion.

[6] *Etudes et Impressions de Guerre*, vol. i, (Paris: Tallandier. 1917). General Malleterre, commanding the 46th Regiment, 3rd Army, was seriously wounded in the battle of the Marne. Taking up the pen on his recovery, he became one of the ablest French commentators on the war.

[7] "No enterprise, perhaps," says a French military publication, "is as purely French as the conquest of the air. The first free balloon, the first dirigible, the first aeroplane all rose from our soil." However, "the war surprised our aviation in an almost complete state of destitution. Our 200 pilots, almost all sportsmen, possessed between them a total of two machine-guns. A few squadrillas, without

material or the tactic of a strategical defence. The light and rapid "75" had been thought of almost exclusively as an arm of attack, in which weight and range were now become the master properties. Its remarkable qualities for defence began to appear in the unfortunate actions presently to be traced, and were only fully understood many months later, when "barrage" fire had been elaborated. The mitrailleuse was essentially a French invention; but its greatest value—in defence—was not yet appreciated. The numerical provision of machine-guns was the same as that of the German Army (though differently organised). It was owing to a more considerable difference of tactical ideas that a legend grew up of an actual German superiority in this arm. In the French Army, all defensive methods were prejudiced; in the German, they were not. The deep trenches that might have saved much of Belgium and northern France were scouted, until it was too late, as incompatible with the energy and pride of a great army. The lessons from recent wars drawn, among others, by the Russian State Councillor, Jean de Bloch, fifteen years before,[8] went for nothing. "It is easy to be 'wise after the event,'" writes Field-Marshal French; "but I cannot help wondering why none of us realised what the most modern rifle, the machine-gun, motor traction, the aeroplane, and wireless telegraphy would bring about. It seems so simple when judged by actual results.... I feel sure that, had we realised the true effect of modern appliances of war in August 1914, *there would have been no retreat from Mons*."[9]

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clearly-defined functions, sought their places on the front." Aerial artillery ranging, photography, and observation had been envisaged, and, more generally, chasing and bombardment; but there was hardly a beginning of preparation.France had at the beginning of the war 24 squadrillas, each of five or six machines, all scouts, of a speed from 50 to 70 miles an hour. M. Engerand says that "Germany entered the campaign with 1500 aeroplanes; we had on the front only 129." Captive balloons had been abandoned as incapable of following the armies in the war of movement then almost exclusively contemplated. "Events proved our mistake," says the official publication already quoted. "Enemy balloons followed the rapid advance of the armies of invasion. Ascending immediately behind the lines, they rendered the adversary indubitable services at the battle of the Marne. Then we hurriedly constituted balloon companies; and in 1915 we followed the German model of 'sausage' balloons."*Mons and the Retreat*, by Captain G. S. Gordon, a British Staff officer (London: Constable. 1918), contains some information of the Royal Flying Corps in August and September 1914. The Corps was founded in April 1912. At the beginning of the war, it included six squadrons, only four of which could be immediately mobilised, with a complement of 109 officers and 66 aeroplanes. These, however, did excellent work from the beginning. The writer says: "If we were better scouts and fighters, the Germans were better observers for the guns. The perfect understanding between the Taubes and the German gunners was one of the first surprises of the war."

[8] De Bloch, who had been a large railway contractor in the Russo-Turkish War, and a leading Polish banker, published the results of his experiences and researches, in six volumes, under the general title *La Guerre*, during the last years of the nineteenth century, and afterwards established a "Museum of War and Peace" at Lucerne to illustrate the subject. His chief thesis was that, owing to the technical development of military instruments and other factors, an aggressive war between States of nearly equal resources could not now give the results aimed at; and there is no longer any doubt that he foresaw the main track of military development as few soldiers did. The following sentences from a sketch of the writings and conversations of de Bloch, published by the present writer in 1902, will serve to show that he anticipated some of the governing characteristics of the Great War:"The resisting power of an army standing on the defensive, equipped with long-range, quick-firing rifles and guns, from ten to twenty times more powerful than those of 1870 and 1877, expert in entrenching and the use of barbed wire and other obstacles, and highly mobile, is something quite different from that which Napoleon, or even later aggressors, had to face. Not only is it a much larger force, the manhood of a nation; it is also a body highly educated, an army of engineers. Its infantry lines and battery positions will be invisible. Reconnaissances will be easily prevented by protecting bands of sharpshooters; and no object of attack will offer itself to the invader till he has come within a zone of deadly fire. The most heavy and powerful shells, which are alone of use against entrenched positions, cannot be used in great number, or brought easily into action. Artillery shares the advantage of a defensive position. If the attackers have a local superiority, the defenders can delay them long enough to allow of an orderly retirement to other entrenched positions. The attacker will be forced to entrench himself, and so the science of the spade reduces battle to sieges. Battle in the open would mean annihilation; yet it is only by assault that entrenched positions can be carried."Warfare will drag on more slowly than ever. While an invading army is being decimated by sickness and wounds, and demoralised by the heavy loss of officers and the delay of any glorious victory, the home population will be sunk in misery by the growth of economic burdens, the stoppage of trade and industry. The small, elastic, and manageable army of the past could make quick marches, turning movements, strategical demonstrations in the widest sense. Massed armies of millions, like those of to-day, leaning on long-prepared defences, must renounce all the more delicate manifestations of the military art. Armies as they now stand cannot manœuvre, and must fight in directions indicated in advance. The losses of to-day would be proportionately greater than in past wars, if it were not for the tactical means adopted to avoid them. But the consequence of distance and dispersion is that victorious war—the obtaining of results by destroying the enemy's principal forces, and thus making him submit to the conqueror's will—can exist no more."With all its errors of detail, de Bloch's picture, drawn when the aeroplane and the petrol motor-wagon, "wireless" and the field-telephone, poison-gas and barrage fire were unknown, was a true prophecy, and all the belligerents paid dearly for neglecting it.For somewhat similar prognostications by a French officer, see *Comment on pouvait prévoir l'immobilisation des fronts dans la guerre moderne* (Paris: Berger-Levrault), being a summary of the writings of Captain Emile Mayer, whose first studies date from 1888.

[9] He adds: "and that if, in September, the Germans had learned their lesson, the Allies would never have driven them back to the

While the German armies were born and bred in the old offensive spirit, their masters had seen the difficulties created by the development of modern gunfire. With a tireless and pitiless concentration of will, the men had been organised, trained, and in every essential way provided, to carry out an aggressive plan of campaign. Yet their generals did not despise scientific field-works, even in the days of their first intoxication, as witness any French story of the battle of Morhange, or this characteristic note on the fighting in the region of Neufchateau and Palliseul: "The enemy, whom our aeroplanes and cavalry had not been able to discover, had a powerful defensive organisation: fields of wire entanglement on the ground; wide, deep holes concealing pikes and sword blades; lines of wire 2 yards high, barbed with nails and hooks. There were also, unfortunately, in certain of our corps, insufficiencies of instruction and execution, imprudences committed under fire, over-bold deployments leading to precipitate retreats, a lack of co-ordination between the infantry and the artillery. The enemy profited by our inexperience of the sort of defence he had organised."[10] For the German soldiers at the outset of the war, this was only a passing necessity. The principle of the instant strategical offensive well expressed the spirit of an authoritarian Government bent on aggression, of its constituency, at once jealous and servile, and its war-machine, sustained by a feverishly developed industrialism. None of these conditions obtained under the Third Republic. Of the weaknesses of the French Army in tactical science, one result is sufficiently tragic proof; in the first month of the war, 33 army corps and divisional generals were removed from their commands.[11]

III. The French War Doctrine

It was not the fault, but the glory, of France that she lived upon a higher level, to worthier ends, than her old enemy. But if we find reason to suspect that, the nation having accepted the burden of taxation and armed service, its arms and preparation were not the best of their kind, that a superstitious fidelity to conservative sentiments and ideas was allowed to obscure the hard facts of the European situation and the changing nature of modern warfare, the fact that certain critics have plunged rashly

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Aisne." This is a more disputable proposition. On the Sambre, the French were immediately driven back; on the Ourcq, the Germans held out for four days, and retired partly because their supply services had given out. To a very large extent they had certainly learned their lesson; and for nearly four years thereafter they bettered it on the Aisne hills.The quotations are from the volume *1914*, by Field-Marshal Viscount French of Ypres (London: Constable. 1919), an important body of evidence, passages of which, however, must be read critically. Lord French in his narrative repeatedly insists upon the slowness with which the need of a "transformation of military ideas," owing to the factors named, was recognised. "It required the successive attempts of Maunoury, de Castelnau, Foch, and myself to turn the German flanks in the North in the old approved style, and the practical failure of these attempts, to bring home to our minds the true nature of war as it is to-day."Of the end of the battle of the Marne, he writes (ch. vii.): "We had not even then grasped the true effect and bearing of the many new elements which had entered into the practice of modern war. We fully believed we were driving the Germans back to the Meuse, if not to the Rhine; and all my communications with Joffre and the French generals most closely associated with me breathed the same spirit.... We were destined to undergo another terrible disappointment. The lessons of war, as it is to-day, had to be rubbed in by another dearly-bought experience, and in a hard and bitter school."There is both courage and *naïveté* in the following tardy profession of the belief de Bloch had expounded fifteen years before: "Afterwards, we witnessed the stupendous efforts of de Castelnau and Foch; but all ended in the same trench! trench! trench! I finished my part in the battle of the Aisne, however, unconverted, and it required the further and more bitter lesson of my own failure in the North to pass the Lys River, during the last days of October, to bring home to my mind a principle in warfare of to-day which I have held ever since, namely, that, given forces fairly equally matched, you can 'bend,' but you cannot 'break,' your enemy's trench line.... Everything which has happened in the war has borne out the truth of this view; and, from the moment I grasped this great truth, I never failed to proclaim it, although eventually I suffered heavily for holding such opinions."

[10] M. Victor Giraud, in his *Histoire*, writes: "The French troops were neither armed nor equipped as they should have been.... Neither in the liaison of arms, nor in the rôle of the artillery, nor in the possibilities of aviation or trenches, had the army very clear ideas; it believed only in the offensive, the war of movement, which precisely, to-day more than ever, calls for a superiority of armament, if not also of effectives.... France could and should have remembered that it was the country of Vauban and de Sère de Rivière.... There was no longer any faith in permanent fortification, but only in the offensive, which was confused with the offensive spirit."Pierre Dauzet, *Guerre de 1914. De Liège à la Marne*, p. 29 (Paris: Charles Lavauzelle. 1916). "I shall not exaggerate much in saying that in many regiments the recruits incorporated in October 1913 commenced the war next August without ever having shifted a spadeful of earth or dug the most modest trench" (Thomasson, p. 19).

[11] Two commanders of armies, 7 of corps, 20 infantry divisionaires, 4 commanders of cavalry divisions. In some army corps, the commander and his two divisional generals were removed (Thomasson, p. 12).

into the intricacies of a most difficult problem, or the risk of being corrected when more abundant information appears, must not prevent us from facing a conclusion that is important for our subject. We do not espouse any partisan thesis, or question any individual reputation; we can do no more here than open a line of inquiry, and no less than recall that the men whose responsibility is in cause had suddenly to challenge fate on evidence at many points slighter than now lies before any studious layman.

In every detail, Germany had the benefit of the initiative. The French Staff could not be sure in advance of British and Belgian aid or of Italian neutrality, and it was bound to envisage the possibility of attack by the Jura, as well as by Belgium. It could not be sure that any smaller strength would secure the Lorraine frontier; and it was possibly right in regarding a defeat on the east as more dangerous than a defeat in the north. The distrust of fortification, whether of masonry and steel, or of field-works, may have become exaggerated by a too lively sense of the power of the newer artillery; but it had a certain basis in the fear of immobilising and paralysing the armies. To discover a happy mean between a dangerous obstinacy in defending a frontier, and a dangerous readiness to abandon precious territory and its people in order to preserve freedom of movement, was perhaps beyond any brain of that time. Nevertheless, when all allowances have been made, it must be said (1) that the importance of gaining time by defensive action was never realised, and this chiefly because of dogmatic prepossessions; (2) that the actual concentration expressed a complete misjudgment of the line of greatest danger; and (3) that these two faults were aggravated by the kind of offensive upon which all hopes were placed. The misapprehension of the German system of reserves, referred to above, and therefore of the total effective strength of the enemy, had led the French Staff to conclude that there was nothing to fear west of the Meuse, and at the same time had confirmed a temperamental belief in the possibility of crippling the attack by a rapid and unrestrained offensive. The whole conception was erroneous.

For Belgium, there was no other hope than a provisional defensive. In any war with Germany, the principal object for France, it now seems evident, must be to stave off the *coup brusqué* till Russia was fully ready, and England could bring more aid. But the traditional dogma was in possession; any doubt was damned as a dangerous heresy. The chief lesson of 1870 was now thought to be the folly of passivity. Looking back upon events, many French soldiers recognise, with General Malleterre, that the French strategy should have been "a waiting disposition behind a powerfully-organised Meuse front, with a mass of manœuvre ready to be directed against the principal attack." "But," adds this writer, "our minds had been trained in these latter years to the offensive *à outrance*."[12] They had been trained in part upon German discussions, the deceptive character of which, and the very different facts behind, were not realised. At its best, for instance in Foch's lectures at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre (1895–1901), there was in this teaching somewhat too much of emotion, too little of cold analysis. The faith in sheer energy and will is placed too high, the calculation of means to ends too slightly insisted upon. It is true, it is, indeed, a truism, that "the battle must not be purely defensive," that "every defensive battle must be terminated by an offensive action, or it will lead to no result." Foch himself, before he had risen to the supreme direction of the Allied armies, had learned to recognise that, with millions of men in play, no effort of will can suddenly give a decision, that the defensive may have to continue for months, even for years, a new war-machine may have to be built up, ere a victorious reaction becomes possible.

In the General Staff instructions of October 28, 1913, the doctrine had received its extremest expression. The milder instructions of 1895 were condemned as based upon the "most dangerous" idea that a commander might prefer defence on a favourable, to attack on an unfavourable, ground.

[12] *Etudes*, p. 66, note. And again (p. 88): "The offensive idea had become very clear and very formal in our minds. It had the place, so to say, of an official war doctrine. The lesson of the Russo-Japanese war and the Balkan wars seemed to have disturbed the teaching of the War School and the governing ideas of our Staff. At the moment when the war opened, there was a sharp discussion between the partisans of the offensive *à outrance* and those who, foreseeing the formidable manœuvre of Germany, leaned to a more prudent, more reasoned method, which they described *as defensive strategy and offensive tactic*."

"In order to avoid all misunderstanding on so important a point of doctrine, the new instructions admit only a single justification for the defensive in combat, that is, the necessity of economising troops on certain points in order to devote more forces to attacks; so understood, the defensive is, properly speaking, no more than an auxiliary of the offensive." "The offensive alone leads to positive results"; this is the sole permissible rule governing the conduct of operations. Attacks must be pressed to the extremity without *arrière-pensée* or fear of heavy losses: "every other conception must be rejected as contrary to the very nature of war" (art. 5). "A Commander-in-Chief will never leave to his adversary the priority of action on the pretext of waiting for more precise information; he will, from the beginning of the war, stamp it with such a character of violence and determination that the enemy, struck in his morale and paralysed in action, will perhaps find himself compelled to remain on the defensive" (art. 6). "All the decisions of the command must be inspired by the will to seize and keep the initiative"; and they must be pursued "even if the information collected up to then on the forces and dispositions of the enemy be obscure and incomplete." The plan should, indeed, be supple, so that changes can be made according to new information; but "success in war depends more on perseverance and tenacity than on ability in the conception of the manœuvre" (art. 15). "The French Army," added the Commission which elaborated these rules, "returning to its traditions, now admits in the conduct of operations no law other than that of the offensive."

Fortunately, no code can do more than hamper the natural elasticity of the French mind. But the direction of the armies from top to bottom, and even the traditional aim of keeping in hand a mass of manœuvre, which had figured strongly in the teaching of Foch and other military writers of ten or fifteen years before, were affected by the current prescriptions of the Staff. We cannot here attempt to trace the growth of the perversion. The spirit of the French command on the eve of the war is, however, sufficiently evidenced in its actual dispositions; and we know that it threw its only mass of manœuvre (the 4th Army) into the Belgian Ardennes in the third week of August, and had to fight the battle of the Marne without any general reserve. In brief, along with every arm and method of defence, the service of information, the preparation of battle, and the art of manœuvre—which is irreconcilable with a dogma of universal and unconditional attack—were depreciated and prejudiced.[13] In the strength and weakness of this creed, France entered the war.

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[13] In *"L'Erreur" de 1914. Réponse aux Critiques* (Paris and Brussels: G. van Oest. 1919), General Berthaut is reduced to the suggestion that some of these phrases were intended "to stimulate the ardour of the young officers," but that "the Command was not at all bound to take them literally."General Berthaut was sub-chief of the French General Staff, and director of the geographical service, from 1903 to 1912; and his defence of the ideas prevailing up to the eve of the war deserves careful reading, unsatisfying as it may be found on many points. It is mainly intended to justify the Eastward concentration, and to controvert those who think the business of an army is to defend the national territory foot by foot. The general appeals to the weight of military authority (which, as we shall see, is less one-sided than he suggests): "From 1875 to 1914, we had 40 Ministers of War; we changed the Chief of Staff sixteen times; changes were still more numerous among sub-chiefs of Staff, heads of bureaux and services. Several hundred officers of all arms, returning periodically to their regiments, contributed to the Staff work of the army. Yet the directive idea of our defence never varied. Such as it was in 1876, so it was revealed in 1914." Throughout this time, concentration was foreseen and prepared behind the upper courses of the Meuse and Moselle with a view to positions being held in the upper valleys of the Marne, Aube, and Seine. The idea that the French eastern frontier was infrangible, General Berthaut considers "extremely exaggerated." If it had not been adequately held, the Germans would have turned thither from the north. The violation of the neutrality either of Switzerland or Belgium was, however, beyond doubt. To cover the whole frontier was impossible; and, "incontestably," the armies had to be turned in one mass toward the east. Trenches are "an effect, not a cause, of the stabilisation of fronts." The general has a very poor opinion of fortresses, the only one to which he attributes great importance being Metz! Liège was "a practically useless sacrifice"; Maubeuge "stopped nothing." These opinions seem to the present writer untenable; and General Berthaut admits that the reaction against fortification "went too far" (p. 182). He may be said to damn the three French offensives with faint praise. The move into Alsace "could not be of any military interest," and was "a political affair." The Lorraine offensive was "necessarily limited," as a distant objective could not be pursued between Metz and Strasbourg. As to Charleroi, France was bound to make a demonstration on behalf of Belgium and "to satisfy public opinion." Much of General Berthaut's apologia is vitiated by his assumption that France had necessarily to face a superiority of force.One of the critics General Berthaut started out to controvert is M. Fernand Engerand, deputy for Calvados, whose articles (particularly in *Le Correspondant*, December 10, 1917, and subsequent numbers) have been reprinted in a volume of 600 pages: *Le Secret de la Frontière, 1815–1871–1914. Charleroi* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 43 Rue Madame. 1918). The French plan of campaign, says M. Engerand, was "humanly impossible. Nothing happened as our High Command had foreseen; there was surprise all along the line, and, what is gravest, surprise not only strategic but intellectual, the reversal of a doctrine of war. After the magnificent recovery

The results in the lesser commands were serious enough. Speaking of the advance into the Ardennes, M. Hanotaux, in general an apologist of the old school, says that it was conducted "in an extremely optimistic mood," that "mad bayonet charges were launched at a mile distance from the enemy without artillery preparation," and that, "doubtless, the spirit of the offensive, ill-regulated and ill-restrained, among officers as well as men, was one of the causes of our reverse." Officers and men took only too literally the rules on which they had been trained. Strengthened by the general belief in a short war, and by an exaggerated idea of the importance of first results, a like infatuation governed the strategy and the tactics of the French armies. A succession of surprises marks the light regard for information of the enemy's means and movements, as a series of instant reverses measures the scorn for well-pondered manœuvre. Was France required by her Eastern ally to attack at once? The attack need not have surpassed the proportions of holding actions punctuating a stout defence. Was Belgium closed to the French armies by the old treaty of neutrality? That did not justify a plan of campaign which left the north uncovered to a German aggression. For all that followed from disunity of the Allied commands, England and Belgium share the responsibility. Had they, as well as Russia, been long in alliance, and Italy's neutrality assured in advance, all might have gone otherwise; probably, indeed, there would have been no war. These circumstances do not afford excuse for a radically unsound conception of the danger and the reply.

A German attack through Belgium had been much and long discussed. If few would have said before the event, as the German Chancellor and Foreign Secretary pleaded immediately afterward, that it was "a question of life and death for the Empire," "a step absolutely required," it was at least more than probable; and we have Marshal Joffre's word for it that the contingency was contemplated by the French Staff.[14] But two doubts remained, even in vigilant minds. Would the invasion by

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of the Marne, we may without inconvenience avow that never has there been so complete a self-deception. The error was absolute and, worse, deliberate, for never was an attack more foreseen, more announced, more prophesied than that of August 1914. Strategists of the old school had not only predicted it for forty years, but had given us the means of parrying it; their ideas were scouted and their work was destroyed."M. Engerand quotes, in particular, Lt.-Colonel Grouard on the impossibility of an immediate French offensive beyond the frontiers (see Grouard, *La Guerre Eventuelle*, 1913; and *L'Art de la Guerre et le Colonel Grouard*, by C. de Bourcet, 1915). Grouard foresaw, among other things, that "the army of the German right, marching by the left bank of the Meuse, would pass the Sambre in the neighbourhood of Charleroi, and direct itself toward the sources of the Oise." M. Engerand's chapters contain a summary of the three French offensives. His general comment is: "No unity of command, separate and dislocated battles, no notion of information and safeguards before and during the combat, systematic misconception of the ground and defensive means, defective liaison between the corps and between artillery and infantry, no manœuvre, but only the offensive, blind, systematic, frantic. If we were defeated, is it an exaggeration to say that it was less by the enemy than by a false doctrine?"Lt.-Col. de Thomasson, on these points, quotes warning notes from General Collin's *Transformation de la Guerre*, written in 1911, and refers to the case of Lt.-Col. Berrot, who, in 1902, had exposed "the dangerous theories that had been deduced from the Napoleonic wars," and who "was disgraced pitilessly, and died while yet young."

[14] Early French writers on the war found it difficult to make up their minds whether there had, or had not, been a surprise in the North. See *Histoire de la Guerre de 1914* (ch. "Septembre"), by Gabriel Hanotaux. This work, the most ambitious of the kind yet attempted, is being published in fortnightly sections and periodical volumes, of which the first deals with the origins of the war, the next three with the frontier battles, and the following ones with the battles of the retreat and preliminaries of the battle of the Marne (Paris: Gounouilhou, 30 Rue de Provence).M. Hanotaux says: "The project prepared by the German Staff of an offensive by Belgium was not a secret. All was public and confessed. There was no surprise in the absolute sense of the word. But there remained an unknown quantity: would the probable hypothesis be realised?" Later, however, he says: "The long-prepared manœuvre consisted in crushing us by the carefully veiled onslaught not of 12, but of 25, army corps, so that the surprise was double for us: the most eccentric movement and the most unexpected numbers.... It was this combination of circumstances, foreseen and unforeseen, that the French Command had to parry: political necessity, surprise, numbers, preparation, munitions." And, again: "The invasion of Belgium *by the left bank of the Meuse* certainly surprised the French High Command" ("La Manœuvre de la Marne," *Rev. des Deux Mondes*, March 15, 1919).M. Reinach, usually so clear and positive, was also ambiguous on this point (*La Guerre sur le Front Occidental*, vol. i.). It suffices he says, to glance at the map: "Nature herself traced this path (Flanders and the Oise). Innumerable armies have followed it, in both directions, for centuries" (p. 30). Nevertheless, the French Staff, though it had "followed for many years the German preparations for an offensive by Belgium" (p. 57), remained in an "anguish of doubt."Much evidence with regard to the events of the first phase of the war is contained in the reports of the French "Commission of Inquiry on Metallurgy," 1918–19, the special task of which was to consider why the Briey coalfield was not defended. On May 14, 1919, General Maunoury testified to disaccord existing between commanding officers at the beginning of the campaign, failure to co-ordinate efforts, and ignorance of some generals of the plan of concentration. On the same day, General Michel said that, in 1911, when he was Vice-President of the Superior War Council, that is, Generalissimo designate, he submitted a plan of concentration based upon a certitude of the whole German invasion passing by

the north be large or small, and would it be more or less extensive, proceeding only by Belgian Luxembourg and the Meuse valley, or also by a more daring sweep across the Flanders plain into the valley of the Oise? Moltke had advocated a march to the North Sea coast, and a descent by the Channel ports, through the *trouée* of the Oise, upon Paris, turning not merely the principal line, but the whole system, of the French fortresses. Bernhardi had toyed with the idea of an even more extensive movement, violating Dutch territory, but seemed at last to favour the more limited project, "the army of the right wing marching by the line Trêves–Stenay, crossing Luxembourg and southern Belgium." In fact, neither of these ways was taken. The invasion pursued a middle route, Holland being avoided, the descent upon the coast deferred, and armies thrown across both the Flanders plain and the difficult country of the Belgian Ardennes.

Notwithstanding the advertisement of the Kaiser's chief Ministers in their famous pleas in justification, on the first day of the war, the French Staff do not seem to have anticipated anything more in the north than an attack by Luxembourg and the Ardennes, or to have altered their dispositions to meet it until the middle of August. We do not yet fully know what are the reasons for the arrest of the German offensive after the effective reduction of Liège, until August 19. Instead of six days, with, perhaps, three more for re-concentration, the German right wing took sixteen days in crossing Belgium. As this week of Belgium's vicarious sacrifice saved France, it cannot be supposed to have been a voluntary delay made simply for the purpose of deceiving the Allies. It had that effect, however. Thwarted at Liège, the German command did everything it could to conceal the true nature of the blow it was about to deliver—by terrorising the population and occupying the mind of the world with its atrocities, by the ubiquitous activity of its cavalry screen, by avoiding Western Flanders and the coast, and by holding up the advance of its first three armies behind the line of the Gette and the Meuse till everything was ready. The Allies altogether failed to pierce the veil of mystery covering the final concentration. They were deceived (1) as to the main direction of the coming onslaught, (2) as to its speed, (3) as to its power in men and armament. General Sordet's cavalry got little information during their Belgian wanderings; the few French aviators still less. No doubt, the Allies hoped for a longer Belgian resistance, especially at Liège and Namur, as the enemy expected a shorter. The French Staff clung blindly to its belief that it need expect, at most, only an attack by the Meuse valley and the Ardennes.[15]

Belgium and of the need of the principal French action being directed to the North. The plan was rejected, after being examined by General Brun, M. Berteaux, and M. Messimy.General Percin, at the same inquiry (May 24, 1919), spoke of "intrigues" and a "real palace revolution" in 1911 to replace General Michel, as future Commander-in-Chief, by General Pau, the offence of the former being to have foretold that the Germans would advance by the left bank of the Meuse, and that they would at once engage their reserves. According to General Percin, in the spring of 1914 General de Castelnau said: "If the Germans extend their fighting front as far as Lille, they will thin it so much that we can cut it in two. We can wish for nothing better." There is other evidence of this idea prevailing in the General Staff: apparently it arose from underestimates of the effective strength of the invasion.Marshal Joffre gave evidence before the Commission on July 5, 1919, but his reported statements do not greatly help us. He defended the concentration under "plan 17," which, he said, was operated much more to the north than in previous plans, nearly all of these foreseeing concentration south of Verdun. The French Staff was chiefly concerned to give battle only when it had its full forces in hand. The 3rd Army had a quite particular function, that of investing Metz. The plan made before the war was not absolute, but was a directive modifiable according to events. Officially, it stopped short at Hirson; but the Staff had foreseen variants to second the Belgian effort. In March 1914, the Staff had prepared a note in which it had foreseen the invasion by Belgium—a plan providing for eventualities. It was, therefore, absurd to pretend that it had never foreseen the invasion by Belgium. The Briey district was under the cannon of Metz, and could not be included in the region of concentration. The loss of the "battle of the Frontiers" was due to the fact that the best units of the German Army presented themselves on the feeble point of our front. On the French side there were failings. Generals who had great qualities in peace time failed under stress of war. He had had to take action against some who were his best friends, but believed he had done his duty. Asked by the chairman with how many rifles he commenced the war, Marshal Joffre replied, "with 2,300,000." Lille, he said, could not be defended.Field-Marshal French (*1914*, ch. i.) says: "Personally, I had always thought that Germany would violate Belgian neutrality, and in no such half-hearted measure as by a march through the Ardennes."

[15] In an article on the second anniversary of the first battle of the Yser, the *Temps* (Oct. 30, 1916) said that, before the war, Belgium was more suspicious of England and France than of Germany. "If our Staffs had wished to prepare, for the defence of Belgium, a plan of operations on her territory, these suspicions would have taken body and open conflict occurred. Nothing was foreseen of what happened, and nothing was prepared."Field-Marshal French says: "Belgium remained a 'dark horse' to the last, and could never be persuaded to decide upon her attitude in the event of a general war.... We were anxious she should assist and co-operate in her

The first French plan of campaign, then, envisaged solely the eastern and north-eastern frontier. The original concentration placed the two strongest armies, the 1st and 2nd (Dubail and Castelnau —each five corps) between Belfort and Toul; the 3rd and 5th (Ruffey and Lanrezac—three and five corps respectively) from Verdun to Givet, where the Meuse enters Belgium; the 4th (de Langle de Cary—three corps) supporting the right, at its rear, between the Argonne and the Meuse. Of 25 reserve divisions, three were kept in the Alps till Italy declared her neutrality, three garrisoned Verdun, and one Epinal. The remainder were grouped, one group being sent to the region of Hirson, one to the Woevre, and one before Nancy. There was also a Territorial group (d'Amade) about Lille. These dispositions are defended as being supple and lending themselves to a redirection when the enemy's intentions were revealed.[16] We shall see that, within a fortnight, they had to be fundamentally changed, Lanrezac being sent into the angle of the Sambre and Meuse, de Langle bringing the sole reserve army in on his right, and Ruffey marching north into the Ardennes—a north-westerly movement involving awkward lateral displacements, the crossing of columns, and oblique marches. Some of the following failure and confusion resulted from the dislocating effect of a conversion so vast.

IV. The Three French Offensives

Instead of an initial defensive over most of the front, with or without some carefully chosen and strongly provided manœuvre of offence—as the major conditions of the problem would seem

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own defence." On August 21, he received a note from the Belgian Government remarking that the Belgian field army had from the commencement of hostilities "been standing by hoping for the active co-operation of the Allied Army," but was now retreating upon Antwerp.M. Engerand (*Le Drame de Charleroi*) says that on July 29, General Lanrezac had sent to General Joffre a report on the likelihood of an enveloping movement by the left bank of the Meuse; that after the German Chancellor's defence, on August 4, of the violation of Belgian neutrality, the Belgian Government asked France for aid; that the French Minister of War had of his own initiative offered to send five army corps, "but, on August 5, our Councillor of Embassy at London, M. de Fleurian, informed the Belgian Minister that 'the French Generalissimo did not intend to change his strategic plan, and only the non-co-operation of the British Army would oblige him to extend the French left.' The Sordêt Cavalry Corps, on and after August 6, reported to the General Staff that 13 German Corps, in two armies, were intended to operate west of the Meuse, and that ten others were ready to advance on the east of the river. On August 7, Lanrezac addressed to the Grand Quartier General another report on the danger to our left; and on the 14th he expressed his conviction that there would be a strong offensive west of the Meuse directly to General Joffre, who did not credit it."Major Collon, French military attaché at Brussels, and afterwards attached to French Headquarters, has published the following facts in a letter to the Swiss Colonel Egli (*Temps*, September 19, 1918): Although the Army of Hanover (Emmich's Army of the Meuse) was mobilised from July 21 and concentrated in Westphalia from July 26, it was not till August 3, after the publication of the German ultimatum, that France offered Belgium her eventual military aid. This was declined; but on August 4, when the violation of the frontier occurred the offer was accepted in principle. On August 5, General Joffre authorised the Sordêt Cavalry Corps to move to the Semoy. It began its march on the 6th, and on that night Major Collon arrived at Belgian Headquarters with a view to assuring the co-ordination of the French and Belgian operations.

[16] "This plan was at once weak and supple. It was feeble because General Joffre, who established it, 'saw too many things,' in the words of the Napoleonic warning.... He knew as well as any one the feebleness of his plan. It was imposed upon him. He sought at least to make it supple" (Reinach, *op. cit.* pp. 58–9).In an article reviewing this volume (*Petit Parisien*, June 16, 1916), M. Millerand, who became Minister of War a few days after the events in question, endorsed this opinion: The French Staff "had to foresee, did foresee, the two hypotheses—that of Belgium, certainly, but also that of Lorraine. Hence general dispositions whose suppleness did not escape weakness, a concentration for two ends." The word "Belgium" here is ambiguous: it is clear that an attack by Western Belgium was not foreseen. The vice of the concentration was not that it faced two ends, "Belgium" and "Lorraine," but that it essentially faced the end of a Lorraine offensive, whereas what was essentially needed was a northern defensive.General Bonnal remarks: "The project of offensive operations conceived by Bernhardi in 1911 in case of a war with France deserved close study by us, which would probably have led to modifications in our plan of concentration while there was yet time" (*Les Conditions de la Guerre Moderne*, p. 115. Paris: De Boccard. 1916).General Palat writes: "The French concentration was vicious. Better conceived, it would have saved hundreds of thousands of our compatriots from the tortures of the invasion and occupation" (*La Revue*, Dec. 1, 1917)."The unknown quantity on the side of Belgium," says Lt.-Col. de Thomasson, "condemned us at the outset to a waiting strategy. The idea of at once taking the offensive madly overpassed the boldest conceptions of Napoleon" (p. 54). "A well-advised command would have understood that it was folly to launch at once all its army to attack troops of the value of the Germans; that the offensive should have been made only on certain points of the front, with a sufficient numerical superiority, and for this purpose the forces must be economised; that, in brief, the beginning of hostilities could only be favourable to us on condition of a superior strategy such as was shown in the preparation for the battle of the Marne, but not in the initial plan or in the first three weeks of the war" (177–8).

to suggest—the French campaign opened with a general offensive, which for convenience we must divide into three parts, three adventures, all abortive, into Southern Alsace, German Lorraine, and the Belgian Ardennes. The first two of these were predetermined, even before General Joffre was designed for the chief command; the second and third were deliberately launched after the invasion of Belgium was, or should have been, understood. A fourth attack, across the Sambre, was designed, but could not be attempted.

The first movement into Alsace was hardly more than a raid, politically inspired, and its success might have excited suspicions. Advancing from Belfort, the 1st Army under Dubail took Altkirch on August 7, and Mulhouse the following day. Paris rejoiced; General Joffre hailed Dubail's men as "first labourers in the great work of *la revanche*." It was the last flicker of the old Gallic cocksureness. On August 9, the Germans recovered Mulhouse. Next day, an Army of Alsace, consisting of the 7th Corps, the 44th Division, four reserve divisions, five Alpine battalions, and a cavalry division, was organised under General Pau. It gained most of the Vosges passes and the northern buttress of the range, the Donon (August 14). On the 19th, the enemy was defeated at Dornach, losing 3000 prisoners and 24 cannon; and on the following morning Mulhouse was retaken—only to be abandoned a second time on the 25th, with all but the southern passes. The Army of Alsace was then dissolved to free Pau's troops for more urgent service, the defence of Nancy and of Paris.

The Lorraine offensive was a more serious affair, and it was embarked upon after the gravity of the northern menace had been recognised.[17] The main body of the Eastern forces was engaged —nine active corps of the 2nd and 1st Armies, with nine reserve and three cavalry divisions —considerably more than 400,000 men, under some of the most distinguished French generals, including de Castlenau, unsurpassed in repute and experience even by the Generalissimo himself; Dubail, a younger man, full of energy and quick intelligence; Foch, under whose iron will the famous 20th Corps of Nancy did much to limit the general misfortune; Pau, who had just missed the chief command; and de Maud'huy, a sturdy leader of men. As soon as the Vosges passes were secured, after ten days' hard fighting, on August 14, a concerted advance began, Castelnau moving eastward over the frontier into the valley of the Seille and the Gap of Morhange, a narrow corridor flanked by marshes and forests, rising to formidable cliffs; while Dubail, on his right, turned north-eastward into the hardly less difficult country of the Sarre valley. The French appear to have had a marked superiority of numbers, perhaps as large as 100,000 men; but they were drawn on till they fell into a powerful system, established since the mobilisation, of shrewdly hidden defences, with a large provision of heavy artillery, from Morville, through Morhange, Bensdorf, and Fenetrange, to Phalsburg—the Bavarian Army at the centre, a detachment from the Metz garrison against the French left, the army of Von Heeringen against the right. The French command can hardly have been ignorant of these defences, but must have supposed they would fall to an impetuous assault. Dubail held his own successfully throughout August 19 and 20 at Sarrebourg and along the Marne-Rhine Canal, though his men were much exhausted. Castelnau was immediately checked, before the natural fortress of Morhange, on August 20. His centre—the famous 20th Corps and a southern corps, the 15th—attacked at 5 a.m.; at 6.30 the latter was in flight, and the former, its impetuosity crushed by numbers and artillery fire, was ordered to desist. The German commanders had concentrated their forces under cover of field-works and heavy batteries. Under the shock of this surprise, at 4 p.m., Castelnau ordered the general retreat. Dubail had to follow suit.

Happily, the German infantry were in no condition for an effective pursuit, and the French retirement was not seriously impeded. The following German advance being directed southward, with the evident intention of forcing the Gap of Charmes, and so taking all the French northern armies in

[17] See Hanotaux, *Histoire Generale de la Guerre*; Engerand, "Lorraine–Ardennes" (*Le Correspondant*, April 25, 1918); Paul H. Courrière, "La Bataille de Sarre-et-Seille" (*La Revue*, Jan. 1, 1917); Gerald Campbell, *Verdun to the Vosges* (London: Arnold)—the author was correspondent of *The Times* on the Eastern frontier; Thomasson, *loc. cit.*

reverse, the defence of Nancy was left to Foch, Castelnau's centre and right were swung round south-westward behind the Meurthe, while Dubail abandoned the Donon, and withdrew to a line which, from near Rozelieures to Badonviller and the northern Vosges, made a right-angle with the line of the 2nd Army, the junction covering the mouth of the threatened *trouée*. In turn, as we shall see (Chap. III. sec. iii.), the German armies here suffered defeat, only five days after their victory. But such failures and losses do not "cancel out," for France had begun at a disadvantage. Ground was lost that might have been held with smaller forces; forces were wasted that were urgently needed in the chief field of battle. Evidently it was hoped to draw back parts of the northern armies of invasion, to interfere with their communications, and to set up an alarm for Metz and Strasbourg. These aims were not to any sensible extent accomplished.

Despite the improbability of gaining a rapid success in a wild forest region, the French Staff seems to have long cherished the idea of an offensive into the Belgian Ardennes in case of a German invasion of Belgium, the intention being to break the turning movement by a surprise blow at its flank. By August 19, the French were in a measure prepared for action between Verdun and the Belgian Meuse. Ruffey's 3rd Army (including a shortlived "Army of Lorraine" of six reserve divisions under Maunoury), and Langle de Cary's 4th Army, brought northwards into line after three or four days' delay, counted together six active corps and reserve groups making them nearly equal in numbers to the eleven corps of the Imperial Crown Prince and the Duke of Würtemberg. But, behind the latter, all unknown till it debouched on the Meuse, lay hidden adroitly in Belgian Luxembourg another army, the three corps of the Saxon War Minister, Von Hausen. Farther west, the disparity of force was greater, Lanrezac and Sir John French having only about seven corps (with some help from the Belgians and a few Territorial units) against eleven corps left to Bülow and Kluck after two corps had been detailed to mask the Belgian Army in Antwerp. Neither the Ardennes nor the Sambre armies could be further strengthened because of the engagements in Lorraine and Alsace.

A tactical offensive into the Ardennes, a glorified reconnaissance and raid, strictly limited and controlled, might perhaps be justified. The advance ordered on the evening of the defeat of Morhange, and executed on the two following days, engaging the only general reserve at the outset in a thickly-wooded and most difficult country, was too large for a diversion, and not large enough for the end declared: it failed completely and immediately—in a single day, August 22—with heavy losses, especially in officers.[18] Here, again, there was an approximate equality of numbers; again, the French were lured on to unfavourable ground, and, before strong entrenchments, crushed with a superiority of fire. Separated and surprised—the left south-west of Palliseul, the centre in the forests of Herbeumont and Luchy, the Colonial Corps before Neufchateau and Rossignol, where it fought literally to the death against two German corps strongly entrenched, the 2nd Corps near Virton—the body of the 4th Army was saved only by a prompt retreat; and the 3rd Army had to follow this movement. True, the German IV Army also was much exhausted; and an important part of the enemy's plan missed fire. It had been soon discovered that the Meuse from Givet to Namur was but lightly held; and the dispatch thither of the Saxon Army, to cut in between the French 4th and 5th Armies, was a shrewd stroke. Hausen was late in reaching the critical point, about Dinant, and, by slowness and timidity, missed the chance of doing serious mischief.

Meanwhile, between the fields of the two French adventures into German Lorraine and Belgian Luxembourg, the enemy had been allowed without serious resistance to occupy the Briey region, and so to carry over from France to Germany an iron- and coal-field of the utmost value. "Briey has saved our life," the ironmasters of the Rhineland declared later on, with some exaggeration. Had it been modernised, the small fortress of Longwy, situated above the River Chiers three miles from the

[18] See Hanotaux, "La Bataille des Ardennes, Etude Tactique et Strategique" (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, Feb. 15, 1917); Engerand, as above; Ernest Renauld, "Charleroi–Dinant–Neufchâteau–Virton" (*La Revue*, Oct. 1916—inaccurate as regards the British Army); Malleterre, *Un Peu de Lumière sur les Batailles d'Août—Septembre 1914* (Paris: Tallandier).

Luxembourg frontier, might have been an important element in a defence of this region. In fact, its works were out of date, and were held at the mobilisation by only two battalions of infantry and a battery and a half of light guns. The Germans summoned Colonel Darche and his handful of men to surrender on August 10; but the place was not invested till the 20th, the day on which the 3rd Army was ordered to advance toward Virton and Arlon, and to disengage Longwy. Next day, Ruffey was north and east of the place, apparently without suspecting that he had the Crown Prince's force besieging it at his mercy. On the 22nd, it was too late; the 3rd and 4th Armies were in retreat; Longwy was left to its fate.[19]

V. The Battle of Charleroi–Mons

The completest surprise naturally fell on the west wing of the Allies; and, had not the small British force been of the hardiest stuff, an irreparable disaster might have occurred. Here, with the heaviest preponderance of the enemy, there had been least preparation for any hostilities before the crisis was reached. On or about August 10, we war correspondents received an official map of the "Present Zone of the Armies," which was shown to end, on the north, at Orchies—16 miles S.E. of Lille, and 56 miles inland from Dunkirk. The western half of the northern frontier was practically uncovered. Lille had ceased to be a fortress in 1913, though continuing to be a garrison town; from Maubeuge to the sea, there was no artificial obstacle, and no considerable body of troops.[20] The position to be taken by the British Expeditionary Force—on the French left near Maubeuge—was only decided, at a Franco-British Conference in London, on August 10.[21] On August 12, the British Press Bureau announced it as "evident" that "the mass of German troops lie between Liège and Luxembourg." Three days later, a Saxon advance guard tried, without success, to force the Meuse at Dinant. Thus warned, the French command began to make the new disposition of its forces which has been alluded to.

Lanrezac had always anticipated the northern attack, and had made representations on the subject without effect.[22] At last, on August 16, General Joffre, from his headquarters at Vitry-le-François, in southern Champagne, agreed to his request that he should move the 5th Army north-westward into the angle of the Sambre and Meuse. At the same time, however, its composition was radically upset, the 11th Corps and two reserve divisions being sent to the 4th Army, while the 18th Corps and the Algerian divisions were received in compensation. On August 16, the British Commander-in-Chief, after seeing President Poincaré and the Ministers in Paris, visited the Generalissimo at Vitry; and it was arranged that the Expeditionary Force, which was then gathering south of Maubeuge, should move north to the Sambre, and thence to the region of Mons. On the same day, General d'Amade was instructed to proceed from Lyons to Arras, there to gather together three Territorial divisions of the north which, reinforced by another on the 21st and by two reserve

[19] See *L'Illustration*, March 16, 1918: *La Défense de Longwy*, by P. Nicou.

[20] The military history of Lille, is curious. See *Lille*, by General Percin (Paris: Grasset). M. Engerand, in his chapter on "The Abandonment of Lille," says that a third of the cannon had been removed earlier in the year, but that on August 21, when General Herment took command, there remained 446 pieces with enough ammunition and 25,000 men, not counting the neighbouring Territorial divisions of General d'Amade. Though Lille had been virtually declassed on the eve of the war, General Percin, the Governor (afterwards cruelly traduced on the subject) and General Herment were anxious, and had begun preparations, to defend it. The municipal and other local authorities protested to the Government against any such effort being made; and at the last moment, on the afternoon of August 24, when the retreat from the Sambre had begun, the Minister of War ordered the abandonment of the town and the evacuation of the region. German patrols entered the city two days later, but it was only occupied at the beginning of October. It has been argued that, with Lille and Maubeuge held on their flanks, and the Scarpe, Scheldt, and Rhonelle valleys flooded, the Allied forces might have delayed the enemy long enough to permit of a definite stand on the line Amiens–La Fère–Laon–Rheims. General Berthaut rejects any such idea, and says that inundations would have required forty days.

[21] French's *1914*.

[22] See *La Grande Guerre sur le Front Occidental*, especially vol. iv., by General Palat (Paris: Chapelot, 1918–19).

divisions on the 25th, ultimately became part of the Army of the Somme. Had there been, on the French side, any proper appreciation of the value of field-works, it might, perhaps, not have been too late to defend the line of the Sambre and Meuse. It was four or five days too late to attempt a Franco-British offensive beyond the Sambre.

To do justice to the Allied commanders, it must be kept clearly in mind that they had (albeit largely by their own fault) but the vaguest notion of what was impending. Would the mass of the enemy come by the east or the west of the Meuse, by the Ardennes or by Flanders, and in what strength? Still sceptical as to a wide enveloping movement, Joffre was reluctant to adventure too far north with his unready left wing; but it seemed to him that, in either case, the intended offensive of the French central armies (the 3rd and 4th) across the Ardennes and Luxembourg frontier might be supported by an attack by Lanrezac and the British upon the flank of the German western armies—the right flank, if they passed by the Ardennes only; the left, if they attempted to cross the Flanders plain toward the Channel. Thus, it was provisionally arranged with the British Commander that, when the concentration of the Expeditionary Force was complete, which would not be before the evening of August 21, it should advance north of the Sambre in the general direction of Nivelles (20 miles north-east of Mons, and half-way between Charleroi and Brussels). If the common movement were directed due north, the British would advance on the left of the 5th Army; if to the north-east or east, they would be in echelon on its left-rear. General Joffre recognised that the plan was only provisional, it being impossible to define the projected manœuvre more precisely till all was ready on August 21, or till the enemy revealed his intentions.

It was only on the 20th that two corps of the French 5th Army reached the south bank of the Sambre—one day before Bülow came up on the north, with his VII Corps on his right (west), the X Reserve and X Active Corps as centre, the Guard Active Corps on his left, and the VII Reserve (before Namur) and Guard Reserve Corps in support. In this posture, on the evening of August 20, Lanrezac received General Joffre's order to strike across the Sambre. Namur was then garrisoned by the Belgian 4th Division, to which was added, on the 22nd, part of the French 8th Brigade under General Mangin. Lanrezac had not even been able to get all his strength aligned on the Sambre when the shock came.[23] On the 21st, his five corps were grouped as follows: The 1st Corps (Franchet

[23] For details, see Hanotaux, *Histoire General* and *L'Enigme de Charleroi* (Paris, 1917); Maurice, Thomasson, Engerand, *loc. cit.*; Sir John French's *Dispatches* and *1914*; Lord Ernest Hamilton, *The First Seven Divisions*; *La Campagne de l'Armée Belge*, from official documents (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1915); *L'Action de l'Armée Belge*, also official; Van der Essen, *L'Invasion Allemande*. For some information in this chapter and the subsequent note with regard to the British Army, I am indebted to the military authorities.After the reference to Brussels, M. Hanotaux continues: "The rôle reserved to the British Army was to execute a turning movement of the left wing, advancing north of the Sambre toward Mons, in the direction of Soignies–Nivelles; it was thought it would be there before Kluck," It was there a day before Kluck. "Unfortunately, as the *Exposé de Six Mois de Guerre* recognises, it did not arrive on the 20th, as the French Command expected.... In fact, it was only in line on the 23rd" (pp. 49–50). M. Hanotaux repeats himself with variations. The Allied Armies suffered, he says, not only from lateness and fatigue, but from lack of co-ordination in the High Command. "It is permissible to-day to say that the Belgian Command, in deciding to withdraw its army into the entrenched camp of Antwerp, obeyed a political and military conception which no longer conformed to the necessities of the moment. Again, the British Army appeared in the region only on the 23rd, although the battle had been engaged for two days and was already compromised between Namur and Charleroi. The rôle of turning wing which the British Army was to fulfil thus failed at the decisive hour" (pp. 53–4). M. Hanotaux mentions (p. 77) the receipt by Sir John French, at 5 p.m. on August 23, of "a telegraphic message qualified as 'unexpected,'" announcing the weight of Kluck's force and the French retirement, but omits to say that this message came from the French Generalissimo. He adds that the British commander gave the order to retreat at 5 p.m., Lanrezac only at 9 p.m., omitting to explain that the French retreat was, in fact, in operation at the former hour, while the British retreat only began at dawn on the 24th, after a night of fighting. "By 5 p.m., on Sunday the 23rd, when Joffre's message was received at British Headquarters"—says Captain Gordon, on the authority of the British War Office (*Mons and the Retreat*)—"the French had been retiring for ten or twelve hours. The British Army was isolated. Standing forward a day's march from the French on its right, faced by three German Corps with a fourth on its left, it seemed marked out for destruction."In strong contrast with M. Hanotaux's comments—repeated, despite public correction, in his article of March 1919 cited above—are M. Engerand's references to the part played by the British Expeditionary Force. First, to its "calm and tenacious defensive about Mons, a truly admirable defence that has not been made known among us, and that has perhaps not been understood as it should be. It was the first manifestation of the form the war was to take; the English, having nothing to unlearn, and instructed by their experiences in the South African war, had from the outset seized its character.... It shows us Frenchmen, to our grief, how we might have stopped the enemy if we had practised, instead of the infatuated offensive, this British defensive 'borrowed

d'Espérey) was facing east toward the Meuse north of Dinant, pending the arrival, on the evening of the 22nd, of the Bouttegourd Reserve Division; the 10th Corps (Defforges), with the 37th (African) Division, on the heights of Fosse and Arsimont, faced the Sambre crossings at Tamines and Auvelais; the 3rd Corps (Sauret) stood before Charleroi, with the 38th (African) Division in reserve; the 18th Corps (de Mas-Latrie) was behind the left, south of Thuin. Of General Valabrègue's group of reserve divisions, one was yet to come into line on the right and one on the left.

Could Lanrezac have accomplished anything by pressing forward into the unknown with tired troops? The question might be debatable had the Allies had only Bülow to deal with; but, as we shall see, this was by no means the case. Meanwhile, the British made a day's march beyond the Sambre. On the 22nd they continued the French line west-north-westward, still without an enemy before them, and entrenched themselves, the 5th Cavalry Brigade occupying the right, the 1st Corps (Haig) from Binche to Mons, and the 2nd Corps (Smith-Dorrien) along the canal to Condé-on-Scheldt. West and south-west of this point, there was nothing but the aforesaid groups of French Territorials. The I German Army not yet having revealed itself, the general idea of the French command, to attack across the Sambre with its centre, and then, if successful, to swing round the Allied left in a north-easterly direction against what was supposed to be the German right flank, still seemed feasible. But, in fact, Kluck's Army lay beyond Bülow's to the north-west, on the line Brussels–Valenciennes; it is quite possible, therefore, that a preliminary success by Lanrezac would have aggravated the later defeat.

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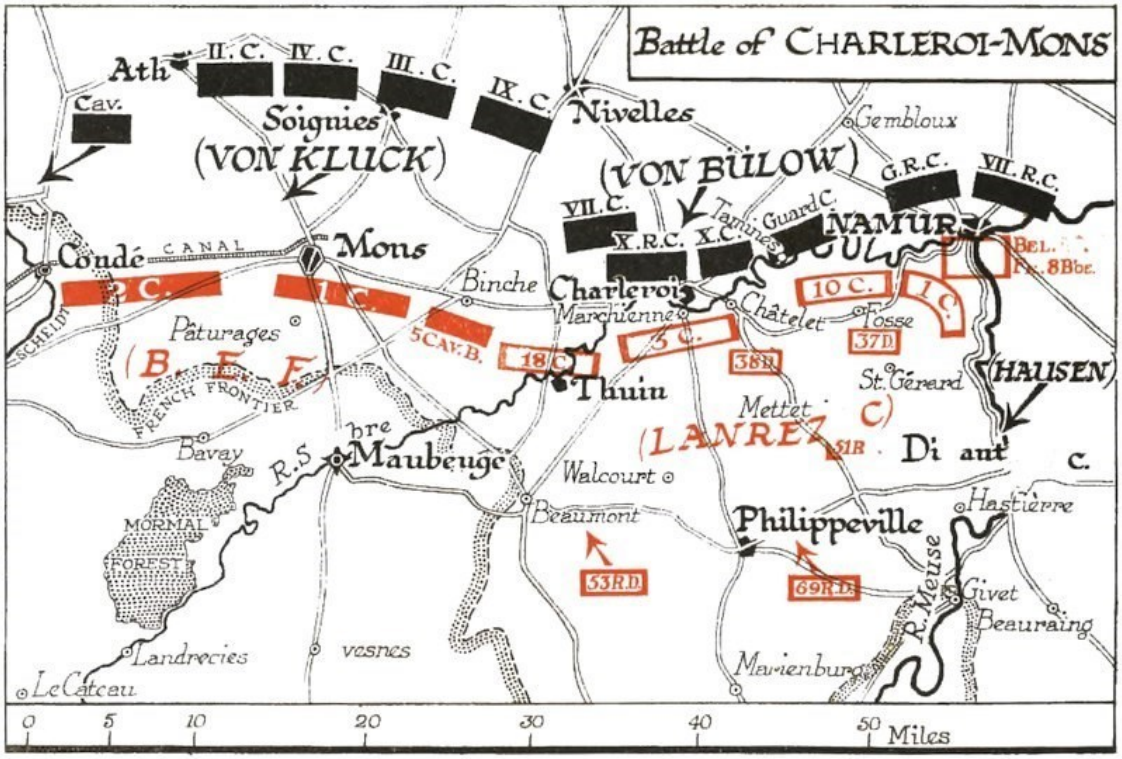
from Brother Boer.'" Then as to the retreat: "The retreat of the British followed ours, and did not precede it. It is a duty of loyalty to say so, as also to recognise that, in these battles beyond the frontiers, the British Army, put by its chief on the defensive, was the only one, with the 1st French Army, which could contain the enemy." M. Engerand, who is evidently well informed, and who strongly defends General Lanrezac, says that Sir John French told this officer on August 17, at Rethel, that he could hardly be ready to take part in the battle till August 24.Lt.-Col. de Thomasson, while regretting that the British did not try to help Lanrezac on the 23rd, admits that an offensive from Mons would have been fruitless and might have been disastrous (pp. 216–8).M. Hanotaux' faulty account of the matter appears to be inspired by a desire to redistribute responsibilities, and to prove that, if the British had attacked Bülow's right flank, the whole battle would have been won. This idea will not bear serious examination. The French Command cannot have entertained this design on August 20, for it must have known that the British force was two days behind the necessary positions. When it came into line before Mons, on the evening of the 22nd, it was certainly too late for so small a body of troops to make an offensive movement north-eastward with any prospect of success. Had it been possible at either date, the manœuvre which M. Hanotaux favours might conceivably have helped Lanrezac against Bülow; but it would have left Kluck free to encircle the Allies on the west, and so prejudiced, at least, the withdrawal and the subsequent successful reaction. It might well have created a second and greater Sedan.In dealing with these events, M. Hanotaux, by adding the strength of Lanrezac's Army, d'Amade's Territorial divisions, the British Army, and the garrisons of Namur (General Michel, 25,000 men), Maubeuge (General Fournier, 35,000 men), and Lille (General Herment, 18,000 men), arrives at the remarkable conclusion that "the Allied armies, between August 22 and 25, opposed to the 545,000 men of the German armies a total figure of 536,000 men." This figure is deceptive, and useless except to emphasise the elements of Allied weakness other than numbers. So far as the later date is intended, it has no relation to the battle of Charleroi–Mons. At both these dates, and later, when the Allies were in full retreat, and both sides had suffered heavy losses, the Allied units named were so widely scattered and so disparate in quality that it is impossible to regard them as a single force "opposed" to the three compact masses of Kluck, Bülow, and Hausen. The deduction that General Joffre had on the Sambre "Allied forces sufficient to keep the mastery of the operations" is, therefore, most questionable.The actual opposition of forces on the morning of August 23 was as follows: Lanrezac's Army and the Namur garrison, amounting to an equivalent of five army corps, or about 200,000 men, had upon their front and flank six corps of Bülow and two corps of Hausen, about 320,000 men. The little British Army, of 2½ corps, had immediately before it three of Kluck's corps, with two more behind these.General Lanrezac published in the *New York Herald* (Paris edition) of May 17 and 18, and in *L'Oeuvre* of May 18 and 22, 1919, dignified replies to certain statements of Field-Marshal French. To the latter's remark that the B.E.F. at Mons found itself in "an advanced position," he answers that the battle shifted from east to west, and "on the evening of the 23rd, the 5th Army had been fighting for forty-eight hours, while the British were scarcely engaged." Doubtless owing to Lord Kitchener's original instruction that it would not be reinforced, the B.E.F. kept, during the later part of the retreat, "two days' march ahead of the 5th Army, and obstinately maintained this distance, stopping only on the Seine." "It was rather French who uncovered my left than I who uncovered his right." General Lanrezac disowns any critical intent in saying this: "In my opinion, in the tragic period from August 22 to September 4, 1914, the British did all they could, and showed a magnificent heroism. It was not their fault if the strategic situation forbade our doing more."In regard to the original French plan of campaign, General Lanrezac refused to put himself in the position of being both judge and party, but added: "The Commander-in-Chief had a plan; he had elaborated it with the collaboration of officers of his Staff, men incontestibly intelligent and instructed, General Berthelot among others. Nevertheless, this plan, as I came to know it in course of events, appeared to me to present a fundamental error. It counted too much on the French centre, 3rd and 4th Armies, launched into Belgian Luxembourg and Ardennes, scoring a prompt and decisive victory which would make us masters of the situation on the rest of the front." "So it was that General Berthelot, on August 19, told M. Messimy that, if the Germans went in large numbers west of the Meuse, it was so much the better, as it would be easier to beat them on the east."



Battle of Charleroi–Mons

However that may be, the programme was at once stultified by the unexpected speed and force of the German approach. The bombardment of the nine forts of Namur had begun on August 20. Bülow's Army reached the Sambre on the following day, and held the passages at night. Lanrezac's orders had become plainly impossible, and he did not attempt to fulfil them. Early on the afternoon of the 21st, while Kluck approached on one hand and Hausen on the other, Bülow's X Corps and Guard Corps attacked the 3rd and 10th Corps forming the apex of the French triangle. These, not having entrenched themselves, and having, against Lanrezac's express orders, advanced to the crossings between Charleroi and Namur, there fell upon strong defences flanked by machine-guns, and were driven back and separated. Despite repeated counter-attacks, the town of Chatelet was lost. On the 22nd, these two French corps, with a little help from the 18th, had again to bear the full weight of the enemy. Their artillery preparation was inadequate, and charges of a reckless bravery did not improve their situation.[24] Most desperate fighting took place in and around Charleroi. The town was repeatedly lost and won back by the French during the day and the following morning; in course of these assaults, the Turcos inflicted heavy losses on the Prussian Guard. While the 10th Corps, cruelly punished at Tamines and Arsimont, fell back on Mettet, the 3rd found itself threatened with envelopment on the west by Bülow's X Reserve and VII Corps, debouching from Chatelet and Charleroi.

That evening, the 22nd, Lanrezac thought there was still a chance of recovery. "The enemy does not yet show any numerical superiority," he wrote, "and the 5th Army, though shaken, is intact." The 1st Corps was at length free, having been relieved in the river angle south of Namur by the 51st Reserve Division; the 18th Corps had arrived and was in full action on the left about Thuin;

[24] Speaking of the attack of the 20th Division (10th Corps) at Tamines, M. Hanotaux (*Histoire*, vol. v. p. 278) says it advanced with feverish ardour only to fall upon solidly held defences. "Our officers had always been told that, on condition of attacking resolutely and without hesitation, they would surprise the enemy and easily dispose of them. But the Germans everywhere awaited them firmly on solid positions flanked with innumerable machine-guns, before which most of our men fell." Of the "insensate immolation" of the 3rd Corps at Chatelet, M. Engerand says: "Without artillery preparation, and knowing that they were going to a certain death, these picked troops threw themselves on the enemy infantry, solidly entrenched on the edge of the town; in a quarter of an hour a half of their effectives had fallen." He adds that the upper command of the Corps was relieved the same evening.

farther west, other reserves were coming up, and the British Army had not been seriously engaged. The French commander therefore asked his British confrère to strike north-eastward at Bülow's flank. The Field-Marshal found this request "quite impracticable" and scarcely comprehensible. He had conceived, rightly or wrongly, a very unfavourable idea of Lanrezac's qualities; and the sight of infantry and artillery columns of the 5th Army in retreat southward that morning, before the two British corps had reached their positions on either side of Mons, had been a painful surprise. He was already in advance of the shaken line of the 5th Army; and news was arriving which indicated a grave threat of envelopment by the north-west. French had come out from England with clear warning that, owing to the impossibility of rapid or considerable reinforcement, he must husband his forces, and that he would "in no case come in any sense under the orders of any Allied General." He now, therefore, replied to Lanrezac that all he could promise was to hold the Condé Canal position for twenty-four hours; thereafter, retreat might be necessary.

On the morning of the 23rd, Bouttegourd and D'Espérey opened an attack on the left flank of the Prussian Guard, while the British were receiving the first serious shock of the enemy. The French centre, however, was in a very bad way. During the afternoon the 3rd Corps gave ground, retreating in some disorder to Walcourt; the 18th was also driven back. About the same time, four surprises fell crushingly upon the French command. The first was the fall of Namur, which had been looked to as pivot of the French right. Although the VII Reserve Corps did not enter the town till 8 p.m., its resistance was virtually broken in the morning. Most of the forts had been crushed by the German 11- and 16-inch howitzers; it was with great difficulty that 12,000 men, a half of the garrison, escaped, ultimately to join the Belgian Army at Antwerp, Secondly, the Saxon Army, hitherto hidden in the Ardennes and practically unknown to the French Command, suddenly made an appearance on Lanrezac's right flank. On the 23rd, the XII Corps captured Dinant, forced the passages of the Meuse there and at Hastière, drove in the Bouttegourd Division (51st Reserve), and reached Onhaye. The 1st Corps, thus threatened in its rear, had to break its well-designed attack on the Prussian Guard, and face about eastward. It successfully attacked the Saxons at Onhaye, and prevented them from getting more than one division across the river that night, so that the retreat of the French Army from the Sambre toward Beaumont and Philippeville, ordered by Lanrezac on his own responsibility at 9 p.m., was not impeded. Thirdly, news arrived of the failure of the French offensive in the Ardennes.

The fourth surprise lay in the discovery that the British Army had before it not one or two corps, as was supposed until the afternoon of August 23, but three or four active corps and two cavalry divisions of Kluck's force, a part of which was already engaged in an attempt to envelop the extreme left of the Allies. Only at 5 p.m.—both the intelligence and the liaison services seem to have failed—did the British commander, who had been holding pretty well since noon against attacks that did not yet reveal the enemy's full strength, learn from Joffre that this force was twice as large as had been reported in the morning, that his west flank was in danger, and that "the two French reserve divisions and the 5th French Army on my right were retiring." About midnight the fall of Namur and the defeat of the French 3rd and 4th Armies were also known. In face of this "most unexpected" news, a 15-miles withdrawal to the line Maubeuge–Jenlain was planned; and it began at dawn on the 24th, fighting having continued through the previous night.

Some French writers have audaciously sought to throw a part, at least, of the responsibility for the French defeat on the Sambre upon the small British Expeditionary Force. An historian so authorised as M. Gabriel Hanotaux, in particular, has stated that it was in line, instead of the 20th, as had been arranged, only on the 23rd, when the battle on the Sambre was compromised and the turning movement north-eastward from Mons which had been projected could no longer save the situation; and that Sir John French, instead of destroying Kluck's corps one by one as they arrived, "retreated after three hours' contact with the enemy," hours before Lanrezac ordered the general retreat of the

5th Army.[25] It is the barest justice to the first British continental Army, its commander, officers, and men, professional soldiers of the highest quality few of whom now survive, to say that these statements, made, no doubt, in good faith, are inaccurate, and the deductions from them untenable. It was not, and could not have been, arranged between the Allied commands that French's two corps should be in line west and east of Mons, ready for offensive action, on August 20, when Lanrezac's fore-guards were only just reaching the Sambre. General Joffre knew from Sir John, at their meeting on August 16, that the British force could not be ready till the 21st; and it was then arranged that it should advance that day from the Sambre to the Mons Canal (13 miles farther north). This was done. Bülow had then already seized the initiative. If the British could have arrived sooner, and the projected north-easterly advance had been attempted, Bülow's right flank might have been troubled; but the way would have been left clear for Kluck's enveloping movement, with disastrous consequences for the whole left of the Allies. It is not true that the British retreat preceded the French, or that it occurred after "three hours' contact with the enemy." Lanrezac's order for the general retreat was given only at 9 p.m.; but his corps had been falling back all afternoon. Kluck's attack began at 11 a.m. on the 23rd, and became severe about 3 p.m. An hour later, Bülow's right struck in between Lanrezac's 3rd and 18th Corps, compelling them to a retreat that left a dangerous gap between the British and French Armies. From this time the British were isolated and continuously engaged. "When the news of the retirement of the French and the heavy German threatening on my front reached me," says the British commander (in his dispatch of September 7, 1914), "I endeavoured to confirm it by aeroplane reconnaissance; and, as a result of this, I determined to effect a retirement 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 made a powerful demonstration as if to retake Binche," to enable the 2nd Corps to withdraw. The disengagement was only procured with difficulty and considerable loss. Had it been further delayed, the two corps would have been surrounded and wiped out. They were saved by courage and skill, and by the mistakes of Kluck, who failed to get some of his forces up in time, and spent others in an enveloping movement when a direct attack was called for.

Such, in brief, is the deplorable story of the breakdown of the first French plan of campaign. By August 25, the local panics of the preceding days were arrested; but from the North Sea to the Swiss Alps the Allied armies were beaten back, and their chief mass was in full retreat. King Albert had shepherded his sorely stricken regiments into the entrenched camp of Antwerp, where, and in West Flanders, they were to drag upon the invader for nearly two months to come. For the rest, Belgium was conquered, much of it ravaged. The forces to which it had looked for aid were disappearing southward, outnumbered, outweighed in material of war, and severely shaken. But the heroic Belgians never thought of yielding. On August 25, they made a valuable diversion, striking out from Antwerp, and forcing the small German watching force to retire to near Brussels. This and the landing of 2000 British Marines at Ostend sobered the enemy, and caused the detention of two corps (the III and IX Reserve) before the Scheldt fortress. The shortlived victories of Rennenkampf and Samsonov at Gumbinnen and in the Masurian Lake region, threatening a greater invasion of East Prussia, also affected slightly the distribution of German troops, though it probably stimulated the urgency of the Western invasion. The French eastern armies were to keep inviolate the pivot of Verdun, the crescent of the Nancy hills, and the line of Epinal–Belfort. The tiny garrison of Longwy resisted till August

[25] "It was expected that the British Army would take its place on the 20th, but it arrived only on the 22nd. On the 20th, it was still far behind in the region of Le Nouvion–Wassigny–Le Cateau. If it had been in place on the 20th, the Allied Army would have found itself constituted at the very moment when the Germans entered Brussels." This last phrase is at least singularly ambiguous: Von Bülow was not in Brussels, but only a day's march from the Sambre, on the 20th. But, if the British had then been at Mons, the Allied Army would not have been "constituted," for Lanrezac's forces were far from being all in place on that day. "It is true," said M. Hanotaux a little later, "that the French Army was not all in place *on the 22nd*, and that the Territorial divisions were in rather mediocre conditions as to armament and *encadrement*" (*L'Enigme de Charleroi*, p. 52). It is Bülow's appearance on the Sambre a day before Lanrezac was ready that makes the French historian credit the enemy with "the principal advantage, the initiative."

26, that of Montmédy till the 30th. Maubeuge held out from August 25 to September 7,[26] and might be expected to hold longer. The front of the retreating armies was never broken; but at what a price was their cohesion purchased—the abandonment of a wide, rich tract of the national territory, with much of its hapless population.

Enough has been said to show that the reverses of the beginning of the war which led to the long retreat were due not only to the brutal strength of the German invasion, but to bad information, bad judgment, bad organisation, an ill-conceived strategy and reckless tactics, on the side of the Allies. The impact on the north and north-west (including now the Crown Prince's Army) of some 28 army corps—considerably over a million men—provided with heavy artillery, machine-guns, transport, and material on a prodigious scale, had never been dreamed of, and proved irresistible.

We shall now have the happier task of following the marvellous rally of will and genius by which these errors were redeemed.

[26] Four years passed ere a detailed account of the defence and fall of Maubeuge was published (*La Verité sur le Siège de Maubeuge*, by Commandant Paul Cassou, of the 4th Zouaves. Paris: Berger-Levrault). There are, in the case of this fortress, points of likeness to and of difference from that of Lille. In June 1910 the Ministry of War had decided that Maubeuge should be regarded as only a position of arrest, not capable of sustaining a long siege; and in 1913 the Superior War Council decreed that it should be considered only as a support to a neighbouring field army. It then consisted of an enceinte dating from Vauban, dominated by an outer belt of six main forts and six intermediate works about twenty years old, furnished with 335 cannon, none of which carried more than 6 miles. The garrison consisted of an infantry regiment, three reserve and six Territorial regiments. In the three weeks before the siege began, 30,000 men were engaged in digging trenches, laying down barbed wire, and making other defences.The siege was begun by the VII Reserve Corps, a cavalry brigade, and a division from another corps, about 60,000 men, on August 25. On that and two following days effective sorties were made. On the 29th the bombardment began. One by one the forts were smashed by heavy guns and mortars, including 420 mm. pieces throwing shells of nearly a ton weight, firing from the safe distance of 9 or 10 miles. On September 1, all the troops available made a sortie, and a regular battle was fought. Some detachments reached within 250 yards of the German batteries, only to be mown down by machine-gun fire. After this two German attacks were repulsed. On September 5, however, the enemy got within the French lines, and on the 7th the place had become indefensible. At 6 p.m. the capitulation was signified, and on September 8, at noon, the garrison surrendered, General von Zwehl saying to General Fournier: "You have defended the place with a rare vigour and much resolution, but the war has turned against you." The German Command afterward claimed to have taken at Maubeuge 40,000 prisoners, 400 guns, and a large quantity of war material.

CHAPTER III
JOFFRE STARTS AFRESH

I. Ecce Homo!

France, land of swift action and swifter wit, was the last one would expect to take kindly to the new warfare. She looked then, as her elders had always looked, for a Man. And she found one; but he was far from being of the traditional type.

Joseph Cesaire Joffre was at this time sixty-two years old, a burly figure, with large head upheld, grey hair, thick moustache and brows, clear blue eyes, and a kindly, reflective manner. His great-grandfather, a political refugee from Spain, named Gouffre, had settled in Rivesaltes, on the French side of the eastern Pyrenees, where his grandfather remained as a trader, and his father lived as a simple workman till his marriage, which brought him into easier circumstances. One of eleven children, Joffre proved an industrious pupil at Perpignon, entered the Ecole Polytechnique in 1869, advanced slowly, by general intelligence rather than any special capacity, entered the Engineers after the War of 1870, and during the 'eighties commenced a long colonial career. His report on the Timbuctoo Expedition of 1893–4, where he first won distinction, is the longest of his very few printed writings. It shows a prudent, methodical, lucid, and energetic mind, with particular aptitude for engineering and administration. After an interval in Paris as secretary of the Inventions Commission, the then Colonel Joffre went out to direct the establishment of defence works in Madagascar. In 1900, promoted general, he commanded an artillery brigade, in 1905 an infantry division. After other experience at the Ministry of War and in local commands, he became a member of the Higher War Council in 1910, and in July 1911 Vice-President of that body, and thus Commander-in-Chief designate.

This heavy responsibility fell to him almost by accident. It was the time of the Agadir crisis; France and Germany were upon the verge of war. M. Caillaux was Prime Minister, M. Messimy Minister of War, General Michel Vice-President of the Council, a position, at the end of a long period of peace, of little power, especially as the Council had only a formal existence. The Government recognised its weakness, but feared to establish a Grand Staff which might obtain a dangerous authority. Moreover, General Michel was not "well seen" by the majority of his colleagues. Messimy thought him lacking in spirit and ability.[27] There were also differences of opinion; Michel thought the reserves should be organised to be thrown into line directly upon the outbreak of hostilities, and he believed in the probability of an invasion by way of Belgium. Generals Pau and Gallieni were the first favourites for the succession. Both, however, would attain the age limit at the end of 1912. Gallieni declined on the further ground that his experience had been almost wholly colonial, and that he would not be welcomed by the metropolitan army. Michel's ideas having been formally rejected at a meeting of the Higher War Council on July 19, 1911, the post was offered to Pau, a universally esteemed officer. The Ministry had decided to strengthen the post of Vice-President of the Council by adding to it the functions of Chief-of-Staff; but when Pau demanded the right to nominate all

[27] Statement of M. Messimy before the Commission of Inquiry on Metallurgy, May 30, 1919, reported in the Paris Press the following day. In his evidence, M. Messimy blamed Joffre for not having been willing, in August 1914, to recognise the danger on the side of Belgium. Undoubtedly, he added, it was a fault of the French Command in 1912 and 1913 not to contemplate the prompt use of reserves, and to fall back on the Three Years' Service law, "which no one would defend to-day." M. Messimy argued that the doctrine of the offensive *à outrance* was common to the French and German Armies, and was at that time universal in military circles.*Joffre, Première Crise du Commandement*, by Mermeix (Paris: Ollendorff. 1919), is a careful and unprejudiced study of the changes, ideas, and personal antagonisms in the French Army Commands during the first period of the war. It concludes with a section in which "Attacks upon Joffre" and "Explanations collected at the G.Q.G.," are set forth on opposite pages.

superior officers, Messimy hesitated, and turned to Joffre, the member of the Council having the longest period—over five years—of service before him.

Joffre was little known outside army circles; and he had none of the qualities that most easily bring popularity. Southerners would recognise his rich accent, but little else in this silent, though genial, figure. His profound steadiness, a balance of mind that was to carry him through the worst of storms, a cool reflectiveness almost suggesting insensibility, were qualities strange in a French military leader. He was understood to be a faithful Republican; but, unlike some high officers, he had never trafficked with party, sect, or clique, and he showed his impartiality in retiring the freethinker Sarrail and the Catholic de Langle de Cary, as in supporting Sir John French and in advancing Foch. When I looked at him, I was reminded of Campbell-Bannerman; there was the same pawkiness, the same unspoiled simplicity, the same courage and bonhomie. Before the phrase was coined or the fact accomplished, he prefigured to his countrymen the "union sacrée" which was the first condition of success; and to the end his solid character was an important factor in the larger concert of the Allies.

While there appears in Joffre a magnanimity above the average of great commanders, it is, perhaps, not yet possible to say that, through this crisis, his sense of justice was equal to every strain. There are friends of General Gallieni who would question it. The case of General Lanrezac is less personal, and more to our purpose. An officer of decided views and temper, who had been professor at St. Cyr in 1880, and had risen to be director of studies in the Staff College, he became a member of the War Council only six months before the outbreak of war, when the opinions formerly represented by General Michel, and partially and more softly by Castlenau, were definitely discredited.[28] Always sceptical of the orthodox doctrine of the general offensive, Lanrezac was convinced by information obtained at the beginning of the campaign that the great danger had to be met in the north, and that the armies should be shifted immediately to meet it. We have seen that Joffre would not accept this view till the third week in August, and still pursued an offensive plan which now appears to have been foredoomed to failure. Nevertheless, Lanrezac was punished for the defeat on the Sambre, by being removed from the command of the 5th Army; and, to the end of the war, the Generalissimo persisted in attributing the frontier repulses to subordinate blundering. Joffre's action in the height of the crisis, his wholesale purge of the army commands, may be justified; it is too late to shelter the Staff of those days from their major share in the responsibility.

It must remain to his biographers to explain more precisely the extraordinary contrast between the errors we have indicated and the recovery we have now to trace. This much may here be said: Joffre was hardly the man, in days of peace, to grapple with a difficult parliament, or to conceive a new military doctrine. He was not, like his neighbour of the South, Foch, an intellectual, a bold speculator, a specialist in strategy, but an organiser, a general manager. The first French plan of campaign, for which he had such share of responsibility as attaches to three years in charge of the military machine, was the expression of a firmly established teaching, which only a few pioneers in his own world had consciously outgrown. It did not reflect his own temperament; but he could not have successfully challenged it, in the time at his disposal, against prejudices so inveterate, even if he had had the mind to do so. It was the first time all the services concerned in war preparations, including the War Council, the General Staff, the Staff Committee, the Higher War School, had come under a single control; and, even had there been no arrears, no financial difficulties, a greater permanence of Ministries, the task would have called for all one man's powers of labour and judgment. Joffre was surrounded during that period by men more positive, in certain directions, than himself, more ambitious, men whose abilities could no more be defied than their influence. "He had more character than personality," says one of his eulogists, who compares him with Turenne, citing Bossuet on that great soldier: "He was used to fighting without anger, winning without ambition, and triumphing

[28] See note at top of p. 249.

without vanity."[29] It was as though Nature, seeing the approach of a supreme calamity, had prepared against it, out of the spirit of the age—an age by no means Napoleonic—an adequate counter-surprise.

The slow growth and cumulation of his career are characteristic. It is all steady, scrupulous industry. It smacks of an increasingly civilian world. There is no exterior romance in the figure of Joffre, nothing mediæval, nothing meretricious. He is a glorified *bourgeois*, with the sane vigour and solidity of his race, and none of its more showy qualities. There is extant a lecture which he delivered in 1913 to the old scholars of the Ecole Polytechnique. He presented the Balkan wars for consideration as a case in which two factors were sharply opposed—numbers, and preparation. Setting aside high strategy and abstract teaching, he preached the virtue of all-round preparation—in the moral and intellectual factors, first of which a sane patriotism and a worthy command, as well as in the material factors of numbers, armament, supplies, and so on. "*To be ready* in our days," he says, "carries a meaning it would have been difficult for those who formerly prepared and conducted war to grasp.... To be ready to-day, all the resources of the country, all the intelligence of its children, all their moral energy, must be directed in advance toward a single aim—victory. Everything must have been organised, everything foreseen. Once hostilities are commenced, no improvisation will be of any use. What lacks then will lack definitively. And the least omission may cause a disaster."

That he and his Staff were caught both unprepared and ill-prepared gives an impish touch of satire to this passage. That it is, nevertheless, the authentic voice of Joffre is confirmed by one of his rare personal declarations in the course of the war. This statement was made in February 1915—when many of the commanders referred to had been removed, and the officership of the French Army considerably rejuvenated—to an old friend[30] who asked him whether Charleroi was lost under pressure of overwhelming numbers. "That is absolutely wrong," replied Joffre. "We ought to have won the battle of Charleroi; we ought to have won ten times out of eleven. We lost it through our own faults. Faults of command. Before the war broke out, I had already noted that, among our generals, many were worn out. Some had appeared to me to be incapable, not good enough for their work. Some inspired me with doubt, others with disquietude. I had made up my mind to rejuvenate our chief commands; and I should have done so in spite of all the commentaries and against any malevolence. But the war came too soon. And, besides, there were other generals in whom I had faith, and who have not responded to my hopes. The man of war reveals himself more in war than in studies, and the quickest intelligence and the most complete knowledge are of little avail if they are unaccompanied by qualities of action. The responsibilities of war are such that, even in the men of merit, their best faculties may be paralysed. That is what happened to some of my chiefs. Their worth turned out to be below the mark. I had to remedy these defects. Some of these generals were my best comrades. But, if I love my friends much, I love France more. I relieved them of their posts. I did this in the same way as I ought to be treated myself, if it be thought I am not good enough. I did not do this to punish them, but simply as a measure of public safety. I did it with a heavy heart."

Such were the character and record of the man upon whom, at the darkest moment in modern history, fell the burden of the destinies of liberal Europe; who was called upon to prove, against his own words, that a great leader must and can improvise something essential of what has not been prepared; who, between August 23 and 25, 1914, in a maze of preoccupations, had to provide the Western Allies with a second new plan of campaign. Some day his officers will tell the story of how he did it, of the outer scene at his shifting headquarters during those alarming hours, as the Emperor's Marshals portrayed their chief pacing like a caged tiger by candlelight in a Polish hut, or gazing gloomily from the Kremlin battlements upon the flames that were turning his ambition to ashes. Joffre will not help us to such pictures; and in this, too, he shows himself to be representative of the modern process, which is anything but picturesque. If he had none of the romance of the

[29] G. Blanchon, *Le General Joffre*, Pages Actuelles, 1914–5, No. 11 (Paris: Bloud et Gay).

[30] M. Arthur Huc, editor of the *Dépêche de Toulouse*, in which journal the interview was printed, March 1915.

stark adventurer about him, he had a cool head and a stout heart; and we may imagine that, out of the depths of a secretive nature, there surged up spontaneously in this crisis all that was worthiest in it, the stored strength of a Spartan life, the will of a deep patriotism, the lessons of a long, varied, pondered experience. So far from dire peril paralysing his faculties, it was now that they first shone to the full. Calm, confident, clear, prompt, he set himself to correct the most glaring errors, and to create the conditions of an equal struggle. We know from his published Army Orders what resulted. Castlenau, Pau, Foch were far away on the east, or at the centre. There were other advisers; but, in the main, this was Joffre's own plan.

Before we state it, and trace its later modification, it will be well to recall the main features of the problem to be solved.

II. The Second New Plan

The first fact which had to be reckoned with was that the main weight of the enemy was bearing down across the north and north-east, and was, for the moment, irresistible. Retreat, at the outset, was not, then, within the plan, but a condition of it. There was no choice; contact with the invader must be broken if any liberty of action was to be won back. Defeat and confusion had been suffered at so many points, the force of the German offensive was so markedly superior, that an unprepared arrest on the Belgian frontier would have risked the armies being divided, enveloped, and destroyed piecemeal.

If the first stage of the retreat was enforced, its extension was in some measure willed and constantly controlled. For all the decisions taken, Joffre must have the chief credit, as he had the whole responsibility. The abandonment of large tracts of national territory to a ruthless enemy cannot be an easy choice, especially when the inhabitants are unwarned, and the mind of the nation is wholly unprepared (the defeats on the Sambre and the Meuse were not known for several days to the civil public, and then only very vaguely). A less cool mind might have fallen into temporising expedients. Maubeuge was to hold out for a fortnight more; the 4th Army had checked the enemy, and Ruffey had repulsed several attacks; Longwy had not yet capitulated. But the Commander-in-Chief was not deceived. He had no sooner learned the weight of Kluck's flying wing than he realised that the only hope now lay in a rapid retirement. The fact that the British force, holding the west flank, depended upon coast communications for its munitions, supplies, and reinforcements, was an element to be counted. In every respect, unreadiness in the north dominated the situation.

Evidently the retreat must be stayed, and the reaction begun, at the earliest possible moment. Not only were large communities and territories being abandoned: the chief German line of attack seemed to be aimed direct at the capital, which was in a peculiar degree the centre of the national life. This consideration, which no Commander-in-Chief could have forgotten, was emphasised in a letter addressed at 5 a.m. on August 25 by the Minister of War, M. Messimy, to General Joffre. It contained a specific order from the Government—probably the only ministerial interference with the operations in this period—thus phrased: "If victory does not crown a success of our armies, and if the armies are compelled to retreat, an army of at least three active corps must be directed to the entrenched camp of Paris to assure its protection." In an accompanying letter, the Minister added: "It goes without saying that the line of retreat should be quite other, and should cover the centre and the south of France. We are resolved to struggle to the last and without mercy."[31] No doubt, these measures would, to Joffre, seem to "go without saying." The retreat, so long as necessary, must be directed toward the centre of the country, and at the same time the capital must be protected.

There was another necessity of no less importance. The retreat must be covered on the east. After the reverse of Morhange–Sarrebourg, this was a continual source of anxiety. On August 25, the German Armies of Lorraine, now reinforced, were hammering at the circle of hills called the Grand

[31] Statement by General Messimy at the Commission of Inquiry on Metallurgy, April 28, 1919.

Couronné of Nancy, and were upon the Moselle before the Gap of Charmes. Belfort and Epinal were safe, and Verdun was not yet directly threatened. Very little consideration of the rectangular battle front—the main masses ranged along the north, while a line of positions naturally and artificially strong favoured the French on the east—would lead to the further conclusion: to stand fast along the east, as cover for the retreat from the north. Castelnau and Dubail, therefore, were asked to hold their critical positions at any cost. At the same time, Mulhouse and the northern Vosges passes were abandoned; Belfort, Epinal, and even Verdun were deprived of every superfluous man, in order to meet the main flood of invasion. The evacuation of Verdun and Nancy was envisaged as a possibility. The line Toul–Epinal–Belfort could not be lost without disaster.

Such were the three chief conditions affecting the extent of the strategic retreat. Conditions are, however, to be made, not only suffered; and General Joffre had no sooner got the retreat in hand than he set himself to the constitution of a new mass of manœuvre by means of which, when a favourable conjuncture of circumstances should be obtained, the movement could be reversed. The simultaneous disengagement and parallel withdrawal of four armies, with various minor forces, over a field 120 miles wide and of a like depth, was an operation unprecedented in the history of war. The pains and difficulties of such a retreat, the danger of dislocation and demoralisation, are evident. Its great compensation was to bring the defence nearer to its reserves and bases of supply, while constantly stretching the enemy's line, and so weakening his striking force. This could not, of course, be pure gain: the French and British Armies lost heavily on the road south by the capture of laggards, sick, wounded, and groups gone astray, as well as in killed and men taken in action. The Germans lost more heavily in several, perhaps in most, of the important engagements, and they were much exhausted when the crucial moment came. On the other hand, the Allies were constantly picking up reinforcements; while the enemy had to leave behind an army of occupation in Belgium, and large numbers of men to reduce Maubeuge, to garrison towns like Lille, Valenciennes, Amiens, St. Quentin, Cambrai, Laon, Rethel, Rheims, to terrorise scores of smaller places, and to provide guards and transport for ever-lengthening lines of communication.

Upon these chief elements Joffre constructed his new plan of campaign. It was first mooted, a few hours after the issue of the order for the general retreat, in the tactical "Note for All the Armies" of August 24, and in the strategical "General Instruction" of August 25. General Headquarters were then housed in the old College, in the small country town of Vitry-le-François. Here, far behind the French centre, undisturbed by the turmoil of the front and the capital, the Commander-in-Chief, aided by such men as General Belin (a great organiser particularly of railway services), General Berthelot and Colonel Pont, grappled with the dire problem and, in the shadow of defeat, imperturbably drafted the design of the ultimate victory.

The tactical note gathered such of the more urgent lessons of the preceding actions as were capable of immediate application: the importance of close co-operation of infantry and artillery in attack; of artillery preparation of the assault, destruction of enemy machine-guns, immediate entrenchment of a position won, organisation for prolonged resistance, as contrasted with "the enthusiastic offensive"; extended formation in assault; the German method of cavalry patrols immediately supported by infantry, and the need of care not to exhaust the horses. "When a position has been won, the troops should organise it immediately, entrench themselves, and bring up artillery to prevent any new attack by the enemy. The infantry seem to ignore the necessity of organising for a prolonged combat. Throwing forthwith into line numerous and dense units, they expose them immediately to the fire of the enemy, which decimates them, stops short their offensive, and often leaves them at the mercy of a counter-attack." The Generalissimo offered his lieutenants no rhetorical comfort, but the purge of simple truth. He knew, and insisted on their understanding, that the shrewdest of strategy was useless if faults such as these were to remain uncorrected.

The "General Instruction No. 2," issued to the Army Commanders at 10 p.m. on August 25, consisted of twelve articles, which—omitting for the moment the detailed dispositions—contain the following orders:

"1. *The projected offensive manœuvre being impossible of execution, the ulterior operations will be regulated with a view to the reconstitution on our left, by the junction of the 4th and 5th Armies, the British Army, and new forces drawn from the region of the east, of a mass capable of resuming the offensive, while the other armies contain for the necessary time the efforts of the enemy.*

"2. *In its retirement, each of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Armies will take account of the movements of the neighbouring armies, with which it must keep in touch. The movement will be covered by rearguards left in favourable irregularities of the ground, so as to utilise all the obstacles to stop, or at least delay, the march of the enemy by short and violent counter-attacks, of which the artillery will contribute the chief element.*

"6. *In advance of Amiens, a new group of forces, constituted by elements brought up by railway (7th Corps, four divisions of reserve, and perhaps another active army corps), will be gathered from August 27 to September 2. It will be ready to pass to the offensive in the general direction St. Pol–Arras, or Arras–Bapaume.*

"8. *The 5th Army will have the main body of its forces in the region of Vermand–St. Quentin–Moy, in order to debouch in the general direction of Bohain, its right holding the line La Fère–Laon–Craonne–St. Erme.*

"11. *All the positions indicated must be organised with the greatest care, so as to make it possible to offer the maximum of resistance to the enemy.*

"12. *The 1st and 2nd Armies will continue to hold the enemy forces which are opposed to them.*"

Articles 3, 4, and 5 specified the lines of retreat and zones of action of each of the Western forces. Articles 7, 9, and 10, like articles 6 and 8 quoted above, indicate the positions from which the projected offensive movement was to be made. The whole disposition may be summarised as follows: —On the extreme left, from the coast to near Amiens, the northern Territorial Divisions were to hold the line of the Somme, with the Cavalry Corps in advance, and the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions in support. Next eastward, either north or south of the Somme, was to come the new, or 6th Army, which was to strike north or north-east, on one side or the other of Arras, according to circumstances. Beside it, the British Army, from behind the Somme between Bray and Ham, would advance to the north or north-east. The 5th Army (article 8 above) had an exceedingly strong position and rôle. With the Oise valley before it, and the St. Gobain and Laon hills behind, it was to attack due northward between St. Quentin and Guise. The 4th Army was to reach across Champagne from Craonne to the Argonne either by the Aisne valley or by Rheims; while the 3rd hung around Verdun, touching the Argonne either at Grandpré or Ste. Menehould.

The great military interest of these arrangements must not detain us. Their publication reveals the fact, long unknown save to a few, that Joffre not merely hoped for, but definitely planned, a resumption of the offensive from a line midway between the Sambre and the Marne, that is, from the natural barrier of the Somme and the St. Gobain–Laon hills. We shall see that an effort was made to carry out these dispositions, and that it failed. The failure was lamentable, inasmuch as it doomed another large tract of country to the penalties of invasion. But, because the dispositions ordered on August 25 were only provisional details, not essentials, of the new plan, the military result was in no way compromised. While dealing with local emergencies or opportunities, Joffre envisaged steadily the whole national situation. The essentials of the "General Instruction" of August 25 were four in number: (*a*) a defensive stand by the armies of Alsace and Lorraine, and a provisional defensive by the two armies next westward, the 3rd and 4th; (*b*) a strictly controlled continuation of the northern retreat while reorganisation took place and forces were transferred from the east to the north-west; (*c*) an ultimate offensive initiated by the western and central armies, of which one additional, to be called the 9th, under General Foch, about to be interjected between the 4th and 5th, is not yet mentioned;

(*d*) the constitution of a new left wing, to meet the extraordinary strength of the German right, and to attempt a counter-envelopment. The Amiens–Laon line fell out of the plan; the plan itself remained, and it is fully true to say that in it lies the germ of the battle of the Marne.

III. Battle of the Gap of Charmes

Everything was conditional upon the defence of the eastern frontier, now at its most critical phase.[32]

On the morning of August 24, Lunéville having been occupied on the previous day, the hosts of Prince Ruprecht and General Heeringen were reported to be advancing rapidly toward the entry of the Gap of Charmes by converging roads—the former, on the north, passing before the Nancy hills, southward; the latter, coming westward from around the Donon, by Baccarat. We have seen (p. 31) that, on the other hand, the 2nd and 1st French armies, in preparation for a decisive action, were ranged in the shape of a right-angle—that of Castelnau (based on Toul) from the foothills north-eastward of Nancy, southward, to Rozelieures and Borville; that of Dubail (based on Epinal) from the northern end of the Vosges, westward, to the same point. How far these positions, with the prospect of being able to close in upon the flanks of the enemy, arose from necessary directions of the retreat, and how far from strategical design, whether of one or both of the army commanders, or of the Commander-in-Chief, does not here concern us; suffice it to say that the two generals won equal honour, and that the Grand Quartier effectively supervised this and subsequent developments of the situation. The opposed forces were now about equal in strength—nine corps on either side.

A space had been left at the point of the angle, north of the Forest of Charmes, west of Rozelieures; and this may have tempted the Germans forward. The 16th Corps of the French 2nd Army, the 8th and 13th of the 1st, with three divisions of cavalry under General Conneau masking them, were ready to fill this space, and, as soon as Lunéville had been lost, proceeded to do so, artillery being massed particularly on Borville plateau. On the afternoon of August 24, the pincers began to close, Dubail holding the imperilled angle and Heeringen's left, while Castelnau beat upon the enemy's northern flank. On the morning of the 25th, the Germans took Rozelieures; at 2 p.m. they abandoned it; at 3 p.m., Castelnau issued the order: "*En avant, partout, à fond!*" Foch's 20th Corps, aiming at the main line of enemy communications, the Arracourt–Lunéville road, took Rémévillе and Erbéviller, east of Nancy, and struck hard, farther south, at Maixe, Crevic, Flainval, and Hudviller, toward Lunéville, which was at the same time threatened on the south-west by the 15th Corps, reaching the Meurthe and Mortagne at Lamath and Blainville. By night, the enemy was conscious of his danger, and escaped constriction by a general withdrawal. On the 26th, further hard fighting confirmed the French victory. Positions were occupied at the foot of the Grand Couronné, on the north, and near St. Dié on the south, which were to save the situation a fortnight later. The Gap of Charmes was definitely closed. The German armies had suffered their first great defeat in the war; and, although little known to the outer world, it did much for the moral of the French ranks. On August 27, General Joffre issued an order praising this "example of tenacity and courage," and expressing his confidence that the other armies would "have it at heart to follow it."

Towards the north end of the Franco-German frontier, another check was administered at the same time to the Crown Prince's Army, near Etain, half-way between Verdun and Metz. General Maunoury, with an ephemeral "Army of Lorraine," consisting of three reserve divisions, formed part of the 3rd Army of General Ruffey, but was given by the G.Q.G. the special task of watching for

[32] For details, see Hanotaux, "La Bataille de la Trouée de Charmes," *Rev. des Deux Mondes*, November 15, 1916; Engerand, *loc. cit.*; a vindication of General Dubail, by "Cdt. G. V.": "La 1re Armée et la Bataille de la Trouée de Charmes," *La Revue*, January 1, 1917; Barrés: "Comment la Lorraine fut Sauvée," *Echo de Paris*, September 1917.

any threat on the side of Metz. He could do little, therefore, to help Ruffey in the battle of Virton.[33] On August 24, however, a German postal van was captured with orders showing that the Crown Prince intended to attack in the belief that the French had engaged all their troops. Generals Ruffey, Paul Durand, Grossetti, and Maunoury held a hurried conference; and, the G.Q.G. having given permission, on the following day Maunoury struck out suddenly at the Crown Prince's left, which was thrown back in disorder.

This victory might have been followed up. But General Joffre did not mistake the real centre of gravity of the situation, and would not change the basis of his new plan. He now considered the eastern front sufficiently secure to justify a transfer of certain units to meet the emergency in the western field. Thither, our attention may return.

IV. Battles of Le Cateau, Guise, and Launois

During the night of August 25—while Smith-Dorrien's men were defending themselves at Solesmes and Haig's at Landrecies—General Maunoury received the order to disengage his divisions, and to hurry across country to Montdidier with his Staff, there to complete the formation and undertake the command of the new 6th Army. This distinguished soldier was sixty-seven years of age. Wounded in the war of 1870, he had taken a leading part in the development of the French artillery, directed the Ecole de Guerre, and restored a strict discipline in the garrison of the capital as Governor of Paris. Two of his phrases will help to characterise this gallant officer. The first was that in which, in the moment of victory, he spoke of himself as having for forty-four years directed all his energies toward "la revanche de 1870." The other was addressed to a group of fellow-officers who were discussing certain German brutalities. He could not understand such things, he said, and added: "When we are in their country, we will give them a terrible lesson in humaneness."[34]

[33] See p. 34. The mismanagement of this battle was the subject of evidence at the Metallurgical Commission of Inquiry on May 15, 1919.

[34] Miles, *Le General Maunoury*, Pages Actuelles, No. 49.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.