





THE INVASION AND  
THE WAR IN BELGIUM

“ Qui de nous aurait le courage de déchirer  
la dernière page de notre histoire ? ”

CARDINAL MERCIER.

“ Wie man das belgische Land behandelt  
hat, das schreit zum Himmel ” (“ The manner  
in which the Belgian land has been treated  
cries to Heaven ”).

PRINCE MAX OF SAXONY.

THE INVASION & THE  
WAR IN BELGIUM  
FROM LIÈGE TO THE YSER  
WITH A SKETCH OF THE DIPLOMATIC  
NEGOTIATIONS PRECEDING THE CONFLICT  
BY LÉON VAN DER ESSEN, PROFESSOR  
OF HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
THE BELGIAN SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS  
WHO DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY

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## PREFACE

IN writing this book on *The Invasion and the War in Belgium*, our aim has been to give, for the first time, a connected account and a complete survey of all the events of the German invasion and the war in Belgium, from the attack on Liège till after the Battle of the Yser. Of course, this account includes only the really important features of that period of recent history, whereas writing on every detail would have been impossible, owing to our lack of knowledge of all these details and also to the fact that it would have required many a volume. That will be the task of the future historians. However, we have gathered sufficient material to be able to expose the facts of the invasion as they really happened. We have submitted our evidence to a careful enquiry and sifting; we have deliberately passed by all that proved to be of a legendary character, and we have adopted, for this work on recent history, the same method we are enjoined to adhere to in dealing with mediæval chronicles or records of modern history.

In that sense, then, our sketch is a critical one; and it is also critical for the fact that we have always referred to our sources, so as to enable the reader to control our evidence.

Our task would have been impossible without the help of accounts furnished by eye-witnesses of the events, actors themselves in the great drama of Belgium's deeds and sufferings. We have not blindly followed their reports; we have tested them by the comparison of the sources and by an enquiry into their respective value.

We are thus greatly indebted to the distinguished Belgian officer who, under the name of Commandant Willy Breton, has published very valuable material in *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, as may be seen by our numerous references to that source. We have also to acknowledge the information we gathered from the official report of the Belgian General Staff: *L'Action de l'armée belge*, and from an account published by *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* newspaper in a separate booklet, under the title *La campagne de l'armée belge*. We have also availed ourselves of private reports furnished by officers and soldiers of the Belgian army; and, however small they may be, we have interwoven the report of our own experiences during the early days of the war with the accounts from other sources.

As to the chapters or passages relating to atrocities and excesses committed by the invaders, we have been as cautious as possible: only authenticated reports have been used, and where the slightest doubt occurred, we have systematically refrained from using material tainted by that suspicion. We think we have succeeded in making clear that

the excesses committed by the German army in Belgium were the result of a methodical system, and that they have the closest connection with the military operations themselves.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to the manager of *The Times* (London) for kindly having given us permission to use material printed in this paper, and particularly for having allowed us to reproduce a large section of a very valuable article published in its columns on "The Battle of the Dunes."

Very vivid impressions and true pictures of the German invasion in Belgium are to be found in the book published by E. A. Powell, war correspondent of *The New York World*, under the title *Fighting in Flanders*. We have, therefore, not refrained ourselves from quoting many times passages from this reliable source. For having been permitted to do so, we are glad to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Powell himself and to the publisher of the book, Mr. W. Heinemann, who responded in the most cordial manner to our request to reproduce the passages in view.

Some aspects of the war in Belgium had already been treated by the well-known author and military critic, Mr. John Buchan, in his masterly *History of the War*, published under the auspices of Messrs. Thomas Nelson and Sons.

To both author and publishers we owe deep acknowledgment for having given us permission to quote some interesting passages of Mr. Buchan's work, and to reproduce roughly one of the author's diagrams of the Liège forts. For the maps, we have drawn them according to the valuable sketches furnished by *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, *L'Action de l'armée belge*, and *La campagne de l'armée belge*.

We cannot but express to our publisher, Mr. T. Fisher Unwin, our sincere appreciation of the great pains he has taken to print this book in as perfect a manner as possible, giving us valuable hints during the printing and doing everything in his power to facilitate to us the publication itself.

May this account of the *Invasion and the War in Belgium* convey to the English-speaking public a true idea of what the Belgian army have done and what the Belgian people have suffered to keep faith unbroken, to stand up against immorality in international politics, and to promote by their example the interests of the higher ideals of civilization!

LÉON VAN DER ESSEN.

OXFORD, 20th January 1917.

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# THE INVASION AND THE WAR IN BELGIUM

## CHAPTER I

### THE RULE OF LAW

AFTER the glorious days of September 1830, the Provisional Government at Brussels declared by its Decree of the 4th October: "The Provinces of Belgium wrested by force from Holland will constitute an independent State."

This decision of the Belgian people was shortly afterwards confirmed by the Conference of the Powers which met at London. The proposal of Lord Palmerston, who represented England, to recognize Belgium as an "Independent State" was accepted. There remained the task of settling the position of our country in its external relations with the other States of Europe. In conformity with the principles of the balance of power in Europe and in view of the rôle to which Belgium's geographical situation seemed to destine her, the Great Powers decided, in the interests of European peace and also in the interests of certain of themselves, that Belgium should form "a perpetually neutral State," and that they should guarantee to her "that perpetual neutrality and also the integrity and inviolability of her territory."

This is set out in Article IX of the Treaty of Eighteen Articles, which was signed at London on the 26th June 1831 by the representatives of the five Great Powers—Austria, Great Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia.

This neutrality was imposed on the Belgians, who were not even consulted on the matter; and this was recalled to Queen Victoria by Leopold I in a letter which he addressed to her on the 15th February 1856. "This neutrality was in the real interest of this country, but our good Congress here did *not* wish it. It was *imposé* upon them." The Belgian National Congress was, in fact, forced to approve Article IX of the Treaty of Eighteen Articles by a vote taken on the 9th July 1831.

The refusal of William I to recognize this Treaty and the hostilities between Holland and Belgium that followed postponed the definitive solution of the question of Belgian neutrality until 1839. On the 19th April in that year the Treaty of London was signed and definitely established the international political status of the country. Article VII

of this Treaty stipulates: "Belgium . . . shall form an independent and perpetually neutral State. It shall be bound to observe such neutrality towards all other States."

That is the rule of law, which was supported by the guarantees of the Powers in accordance with Article I of the Treaty of London:—

H.M. the Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary and Bohemia, H.M. the King of the French, H.M. the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, H.M. the King of Prussia, and H.M. the Emperor of All the Russias declare that the Articles hereunto annexed and forming the tenor of the Treaty concluded this day between H.M. the King of the Belgians and H.M. the King of the Netherlands, Grand Duke of Luxemburg, are considered as having the same force and validity as if they were textually inserted in the present Act, and that they are thus placed under the *Guarantee of their said Majesties*.

Henceforth Belgium was to fulfill the function of a buffer-State, to which Nature seemed to have destined her for centuries; but she was to do this for the advantage of the Powers who had imposed it upon her: she must be sacrificed to the exigencies of the European balance of power. She had just concluded a contract with the guarantors of her neutrality—a contract the exact nature of which is clearly expressed in the following passage in the letter addressed by Queen Victoria to Leopold I on the 12th February 1856:—

Belgium of its own accord bound itself to remain neutral, and its very existence is based upon that neutrality, which the other Powers have guaranteed and are bound to maintain if Belgium keeps her engagements.

Note these words: "Its very existence is based upon that neutrality." The absolute and voluntary maintenance of her neutrality is the primary condition of her existence, because if she herself were to violate, or to permit to be violated, this neutrality to which she is bound, she would imperil the system of the balance of power in Europe. From England came yet another declaration which clearly expresses this conception. In 1870 Disraeli, speaking in the House of Commons, solemnly affirmed:—

The Treaties on which the neutrality of Belgium is based were concluded in the general interests of Europe. . . .<sup>1</sup>

There flow from this consequences of the greatest importance for the part that Belgium was forced to play by virtue of her "neutralization" by the Powers.<sup>2</sup>

Belgium, as a neutralized State, is bound herself to defend her neutrality, if it is threatened, and to take all measures necessary for such defence. That is the origin of the existence of the Belgian army, of the fortifications of the Meuse, and of the entrenched camp of Antwerp. Belgium had not only the right but also the duty to defend

<sup>1</sup> That is the primary *object* of Belgian neutrality, but Disraeli did not omit to point out its special interest to England, adding: "And also with a very clear idea of the importance to England of these arrangements." This accessory political interest must be distinguished from the primary object.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. Waxweiler, *La Belgique neutre et loyale*, pp. 48 et seq., Paris and Lausanne, 1915; Ch. De Visscher, "The Neutrality of Belgium," in the *Political Quarterly*, 1915, pp. 17-40.

herself against aggression. If she allowed herself to be drawn by another State into an attitude likely to prejudice her guarantors, she would, by that alone, tend to disturb that balance of interests which forms the very basis of the agreement by which she is bound. This would be to destroy by her own action the reasons for her existence as a neutral State in accordance with the conception expressed in the letter of Queen Victoria quoted above.

This defence of neutrality includes not only resistance to every attack on her borders, but also the prevention of a belligerent State sending across neutral territory troops or ammunition or supply columns. Whatever divergencies of opinion there may have been on this topic among jurists, the question was formally settled by the Hague Convention<sup>1</sup> of 18th October 1907, to which forty-four States adhered by appending their signatures.<sup>2</sup>

The Hague Conference regarded the resistance of a neutral State to every attack against its neutrality as a duty so essential that it decided:—

The resistance, even by force, of a neutral Power to attempts against its neutrality cannot be considered as acts of hostility.<sup>3</sup>

The duty of neutrality imposed upon Belgium therefore compelled her to armed resistance to every aggression. Was Belgium bound to content herself with resistance by her own forces, or could she conclude an alliance with another State with the object of resisting an invader more effectually and of fulfilling her international mission more perfectly?

All jurists agree that a neutralized State cannot conclude an offensive alliance, for such an alliance would imperil the international equilibrium that it is bound to preserve. Nor can there be any question of a *defensive* alliance of such a nature as to involve the neutralized State in a war against a third State, imposing upon it a possible co-operation in the defence of a foreign country.

On the other hand, it seems impossible to deny to a neutralized State the right to conclude a simple defensive alliance, which is merely aimed at resisting any attack by another Power against the neutralized nation itself, and the more so, since by so doing the neutralized State may thereby be the better able to fulfill the task which the guarantors of its international status have entrusted to it.

Though jurists are far from being in accord upon this question,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fifth Convention, Article II.

<sup>2</sup> The provisions of the Hague Convention only apply to the territory of States who have declared themselves neutral during a war between other States, but it is beyond doubt that they also apply to the territory of a State which is permanently neutral and has been obliged by the Powers to accept that international status.

<sup>3</sup> Fifth Convention, Article X.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the divergent opinions of Arendt, *Essai sur la neutralité de la Belgique*, Brussels, 1845; Hilty, *Die Neutralität der Schweiz in ihren heutigen Auffassung*, Berne, 1889; Fourgassié, *La neutralité de la Belgique*, Paris, 1902; A. Rivier, *Principes du droit des gens*, vol. i. pp. 109, 275, vol. ii. p. 60, Paris, 1896; Kleen, *Lois et usages de la neutralité*, 7. 1, Paris, 1898; Piccioni, *Essai sur la neutralité perpétuelle*, Paris, 2nd ed., 1902; E. Descamps, *La neutralité de la Belgique*, Brussels and Paris, 1902; Hagerup, "La neutralité permanente," in *La Revue générale de droit international*, vol. xii. pp. 577 et seq., 1905; Des Cressonnières, "La neutralité de la Belgique

there is one fact which in itself seems to prove that a neutral State is not absolutely deprived of the right to conclude defensive alliances. Several years ago M. Beernaert, the Belgian Minister, advocated a Dutch-Belgian alliance, and this proposal attracted many supporters in Belgium. This plan had as its object the defence of Belgian neutrality considered as possessing an interest common to both countries. On this occasion no serious legal objection was made.

Such is the interpretation that history and the controversies of theorists permit to be established on the topic of the permanent neutrality imposed on Belgium by the Treaty of London.

The Treaty of 1839 was not the only document in which the neutrality of Belgium was expressly stated and guaranteed. There was also a confirmation in 1870 which is very interesting, quite as much from the circumstances in which it was drawn up as from its exact meaning.

On the eve of the Franco-German War of 1870, Bismarck, in order to alienate the sympathy of neutrals from France, published the famous "Benedetti Treaty" which Napoleon III drafted in 1866 against the integrity of Belgium, and which had remained as a simple proposal. The English Government were afraid that a French victory would arouse again the covetous schemes of the Emperor, and in order to prevent any surprise, asked both belligerents whether they intended to respect Belgian neutrality. A special convention resulted between Great Britain and Prussia on the one hand, and between Great Britain and France on the other. The Treaties, signed at London on the 9th August 1870, commence by a declaration that the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland of the one part and the King of Prussia and the Emperor of the French of the other part, "desiring at the present time to record in a solemn act their settled determination to maintain the independence and neutrality of Belgium as established by Article VII of the Treaty signed at London on the 19th April 1839 . . . have resolved to conclude between themselves a separate Treaty, which, without affecting or weakening the conditions of the above-mentioned quintuple Treaty [of London], will form a *subsidiary Act accessory thereto*."<sup>1</sup>

et le droit d'alliance," in *La Revue de droit international et de législation comparée*, 2nd Ser., vol. ix. pp. 253 et seq., 1907; R. Frank, *Belgium's Neutrality, its Origin, Signification, and End*, p. 16 et seq., Tübingen, 1915. The last author, Professor of International Law at Munich University, says that the study of the historical circumstances in which Belgian neutrality was formed can alone furnish the material for a solution of the question whether neutral Belgium could form alliances. In applying this principle, he arrives at quite erroneous conclusions. R. Frank admits that Belgium was neutralized in the interests of the balance of power in Europe. Therefore he is quite illogical in refusing Belgium the right of forming defensive alliances intended for the better protection of her neutrality, thereby securing the surer prevention of a disturbance of the balance of power in Europe. See Ch. De Visscher, *Belgium's Case: a Juridical Enquiry*, London, 1916.

<sup>1</sup> As to the absolutely false interpretation put upon these Treaties of 1870 by certain advocates of the German cause, such as Bernhard Dernburg, and the American Professor Burgess, see J. M. Beck, *The Evidence in the Case*, pp. 192-4 (New York, 1915), and the *Bureau documentaire belge*, Note No. 40, published under the title "The temporary Treaties of 1870 and their meaning in relation to the neutrality of Belgium" in *Cahiers documentaires* (Le Havre), 1st Ser., No. 10. The German Professor, R. Frank (*The Neutrality of Belgium*, p. 14), himself admits that this interpretation is erroneous. It is only fair to mention that the German propagandists who

This solemn confirmation of Belgian neutrality was also expressed in a letter addressed to Baron Nothomb, the Minister of Belgium at Berlin, on the 22nd July of the same year, which runs as follows:—

MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

Confirming my verbal assurances, I have the honour to give you in writing the declaration, which is unnecessary having regard to the Treaties in force, that the Northern Confederation and its Allies will respect the neutrality of Belgium, provided that it is respected by the other belligerent party.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, in 1907 the Fifth Hague Convention confirmed once more the rule of law for Belgium by stipulating, for all neutral Powers in general, that the territory of these Powers should be inviolable, and that belligerents should be forbidden to send across that territory either troops or ammunition or supply columns.<sup>2</sup>

These form the solid foundations of the independence and neutrality of Belgium. We will not mention here the verbal guarantees given on different occasions by official representatives of the German Empire.<sup>3</sup> Their value may be estimated by recalling the incredible statement of M. Von Below, the German Minister at Brussels, on the very morning of the day on which he was to present the German ultimatum:—

The troops will not cross Belgian territory. Grave events are about to happen. It may be that you will see the roof of your neighbour's house in flames, but the fire will spare your home.<sup>4</sup>

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assert that the 1870 Treaties replaced that of 1839 and therefore conclude that, as these Treaties expired in 1872, Belgian neutrality ceased to exist at the same time, can quote in support of their theory some remarks by the French historian Albert Sorel in his *Histoire diplomatique de la guerre franco-allemande*, vol. i. p. 224, 1875. See Ch. De Visscher, *Belgium's Case*.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne: textes et documents*, p. 5, London, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Fifth Convention, Articles I and II.

<sup>3</sup> See the First Belgian Grey Book, No. 12 and annexe: "Letter addressed by M. Davignon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Ministers of the King at Berlin, London, and Paris, and the Letter addressed by the Minister at Berlin to M. Davignon."

<sup>4</sup> H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 7. This statement was made to a member of the staff of the newspaper *Le Soir*. Cf. E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* p. 38.

## CHAPTER II

### FIDELITY TO LAW

FROM the moment when the Treaty of London entrusted to Belgium, by the unconditional preservation of her neutrality, the task of preventing the disturbance of the balance of power in Europe, that country has carried out her delicate task with continuous and absolute loyalty.<sup>1</sup> The sense of that duty guided the Government of Leopold I, who himself solemnly declared, on the occasion of the opening of the Belgian Parliament on the 10th November 1840: "The position of Belgium has been settled by Treaties, and perpetual neutrality has been solemnly assured to her. . . . Neutrality—and it is impossible to be too sure of it—is the true aim of our policy. To maintain it sincerely, loyally, and firmly must be our constant endeavour."

Declarations to the same effect were made by Leopold II in his Speech from the Throne in 1870. "Belgium," said the King on that occasion, "in the position in which she is placed by international law, will mistake neither her duty towards other States nor her duty towards herself. . . . The Belgian people . . . are not likely to forget what they have to preserve, namely the welfare, the liberty, the honour, nay, the very existence of their country." At that difficult period, when the Franco-German War threatened every moment to occasion an incident imperilling the maintenance of her neutrality, Belgium rose to the height of her task. Desiring to enforce her rights of neutrality in the spirit as well as in the letter, she limited the right of her people to supply arms and munitions to the combatants.<sup>2</sup> After the Battle of Sedan in September 1870, the German Government asked Belgium for permission to send the German wounded across Belgian territory. France protested on the ground that such permission would amount to a violation of neutrality, and Belgium refused to accede to the request of Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

Since the Franco-German War, Belgium has observed perfect impartiality towards her two great neighbours. The proof of this loyalty is well known, and has been recently recalled in a way which enables us to dispense with further mention of it.<sup>4</sup> Yet there are some incidents which are too characteristic to be omitted here.

<sup>1</sup> See E. Waxweiler, *Le procès de la neutralité belge*, Paris and Lausanne, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Beck, *The Evidence in the Case*, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Why we are at War*, by members of the Oxford Modern History Faculty, pp. 18-19, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1914.

<sup>4</sup> E. Waxweiler, *La Belgique neutre et loyale*, pp. 16 et seq. P. Hymans, in the preface to *La neutralité de la Belgique* (Official Publication of the Belgian Government), pp. 14 et seq., Paris, 1915. Add the volume of E. Waxweiler, *Le procès de la neutralité belge*.



M. Hymans, the leader of the Liberal Party, has related in an *American Review*<sup>1</sup> how he was asked by the members of the majority to recommend the party newspapers to be reserved and prudent in their discussion of German affairs. On the 2nd August 1914, the very day of the German ultimatum, the Belgian Government was concerned to prevent and repress every breach of neutrality, even if only moral. In the morning, a Brussels newspaper, *Le Petit Bleu*, having published an article headed "Long Live France. Down with the German Barbarians!" M. Carton de Wiart, the Minister of Justice, ordered the whole issue to be confiscated, and directed that the editor should be prosecuted.<sup>2</sup>

The only charge that might be brought against the Belgian Government is that relating to the so-called "Anglo-Belgian Conventions."<sup>3</sup> Impartial neutrals who have examined the text of these documents have arrived at the same conclusions as those which constitute the official reply of the Belgian Government. They were at the worst mere conversations between soldiers, in no way binding upon their respective Governments, and expressly stated that English troops would not enter Belgium until there had been an effective violation of our neutrality by Germany.<sup>4</sup>

The conscience of Belgium is clear and spotless. As M. Paul Hymans says: "She can offer herself, proud and confident, to the judgment of the universe."

Is it the same with Germany? An examination of some events in our relations with that country will furnish an answer to that question, and will also demonstrate that the plot against Belgian neutrality does not date from 2nd August 1914.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Outlook* of 30th September 1914 at p. 255. See also *La neutralité de la Belgique* at pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> *La neutralité de la Belgique* at p. 18. See also the instructions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the diplomatic representatives abroad in the First Belgian Grey Book, I, No. 2 and annexe, and No. 3, and also the circular sent on 1st August by M. Berruyer, the Minister, to the Governors of the Provinces in the Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 71, annexe.

<sup>3</sup> Many works have been published upon this topic. It is unnecessary to give a complete list here. If one is desired, it will be sufficient to consult the bibliographical index published by the *Cahiers documentaires*. We will limit ourselves to mentioning J. van den Heuvel, "De la violation de la neutralité belge" in *Le Correspondant*, 10th December 1914; H. Welschinger, *La neutralité de la Belgique*, pp. 48 et seq. (*Pages Actuelles*, 1914-15), Paris, 1915; J. M. Beek, *The Evidence in the Case* (an excellent account), pp. 229-37; E. Waxweiler, *La Belgique neutre et loyale*, pp. 175-90; Baron Beyens, *L'Allemagne avant la guerre*, Paris and Brussels, 1915. The text of the incriminating documents will be found in E. Brunet's *Calomnies allemandes. Les conventions anglo-belges*, Paris, 1915. Some reserve should be made as to the chapter in which M. Brunet attempts to prove that the cover of the documents with the indorsement *Conventions anglo-belges* is a German forgery. His arguments are not convincing. Besides, this point is of no importance in the controversy as a whole. See E. Waxweiler, *Le procès de la neutralité belge*, pp. 50-3.

<sup>4</sup> The official reply of the Belgian Government will be found in the Second Belgian Grey Book, Nos. 98, 99, 101, and 103. See also the brochure published in the United States by the Belgian Legation at Washington, *The Innocence of Belgium*, where will be found the text of the important letter which was sent by Sir Edward Grey to the Belgian Minister at London on the 7th April 1913. The French version of this letter is printed in the above-mentioned book of E. Waxweiler at pp. 184-5, and in the second Belgian Grey Book, No. 100.

<sup>5</sup> It is to be borne in mind that we do not lose sight of the fact that other Powers besides Germany have, during the nineteenth century, toyed with dreams of aggrandise-

It is well known that, at the commencement of the nineteenth century, Germany regarded the Meuse as a natural boundary and a military barrier, necessary for her defence against an attack by France. Fear of France weighed heavily in the deliberations at the Congress of Vienna, and, as is known, had much to do with the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1814. When the Allies invaded France after the Battle of Leipzig, they placed the lands between the Rhine and the Meuse under the administration of a single Commissioner-General, and reserved them as disposable territory. Little by little the ancient idea of the advance of France to the Rhine gave place to the idea of the advance of Prussia to the Meuse. Under the influence of this idea there were inserted, in the first project for federal organization which Prussia prepared in 1815, these words: "There is a proposal to incorporate Belgium and, if possible, the whole of the Netherlands in the German Confederation. The idea is excellent. With these countries there could be reconstituted the Circle of Burgundy under the autonomous rule of the Prince of the Netherlands." This is one of the earliest manifestations of Pan-Germanism, of the theory of "Grösseres Deutschland" which was to develop more and more in the course of the nineteenth century.

When the Belgian Revolution of 1830 called the attention of European diplomacy to the future of our country, interesting statements were made in Germany which show us a military author and a representative of the German "patriots" in singular agreement as to the measures to be taken with regard to Belgium.

Clausewitz proposed the conquest of Belgium, pure and simple, as the real object of a German war. Belgium, he says, is not too large and possesses great resources. If Belgium were conquered, the German army left to occupy it would in fact form an advance guard not too distant from the main body, and in this way the conquest might be permanent. Public opinion in Belgium, at first hostile, would soon calm down and make effective occupation not very difficult. This effective occupation must in any case extend along the Meuse as far as its confluence with the Sambre—that is, up to Namur. Once again the advance to the Meuse is recommended here. Later on this idea of Clausewitz occurred to Moltke more than once, but his successful military operations relieved him from the need of putting it into practice. For the conquest of Belgium was regarded only as an alternative in case the offensive against France proved unsuccessful.

Almost at the same moment the old patriot Arndt published an article entitled "Belgium and What Depends upon Her," in which he

ment and with projects of "compensation" at our expense. But there is a great difference between the plans of a moment conceived by a monarch with the ambitions of a conqueror and the continuous and repeated intentions of Prussia. The facts which form the basis of the conclusions developed in this sketch are borrowed from the "Mémoire d'Emile Banning sur la défense de la Meuse." This memorandum is printed in its entirety in the *Cahiers documentaires*, 1st Ser., Nos. 1 to 5. In this memorandum Banning quotes the sources of his information wherever he does not speak as a contemporary witness. This very remarkable document was written in March 1881, and revised and completed in October 1886. As to Banning himself, see the *Cahiers documentaires*, 1st Ser., No. 5.

uttered a warning that the expedient of neutral Belgium constituted a danger to peace.<sup>1</sup>

These statements acquire peculiar significance when it is remembered that nearly five months' diplomatic pressure on the part of France and England was necessary in order to induce Prussia to sign, in 1831, the Treaty of Eighteen Articles, which established the neutrality of Belgium.

From the moment when the Treaty of London definitely established the international status of our country, it becomes necessary to distinguish between the attitude of the political partisans of "Greater Germany" and that of the military party in Germany.

From the time that the Congress of Vienna frustrated the efforts of Prussia to obtain the Principality of Liège and the possession of the right bank of the Meuse in Limburg, German patriots never ceased to protest against what they considered as a mutilation of Germany.

In 1830 Baron Von Stein proclaimed that the frontiers of Germany had been weakened "by taking from it Limburg, Liège, Luxemburg, and Prussian Gueldres." As years went by, the indignation of the supporters of "Greater Germany" became no feebler. In 1855 Gerwinus wrote in his *History of the Nineteenth Century*, the importance of which is shown by the fact that this history was a classic in Germany:—

It would have been easy for the Congress of Vienna to have given Germany a solid rampart against France by resting Prussia on the North Sea and delivering to her those bases for a strong defence which military experts declare to be indispensable—Mainz, Luxemburg, Liège, and the fortresses of the Meuse.<sup>2</sup>

In 1870 the fiery Treitschke renewed this language in a stronger form.<sup>3</sup>

The same recrimination occurred at the National Assembly at Frankfurt in 1848. In his report on the question of the Meuse frontier, the deputy Zacharia said:—

Although the diplomatists of Vienna might have found in the line of the Meuse the most natural of frontiers, to which Germany had an incontestable historical right, since the Duchies of Cleves, Juliers, and Gueldres at one time not only touched the Meuse, but even stretched to the other bank, and ancient Limburg, situated wholly on the right bank of the Meuse, had belonged to Germany as an integral part of the Circle of Burgundy, the politicians of 1815 preferred to dismember the ancient land of Germany and to trace with the pencil a boundary which, violating in an equal degree the rights, the nationality, and the interests of Germany, cut her off from the Meuse.<sup>4</sup>

And the Assembly applauded the aged Arndt, whose ideas on Belgian neutrality we have already mentioned, when he expressed the hope that some day they would regain "the great western rivers," when he foretold the day when, by the force of events, Holland would

<sup>1</sup> This was recalled by Ulrich Rauscher in an article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of 7th May 1915, where he gives the views of the present German policy regarding Belgium under the title "The Bruges Programme."

<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte des 19<sup>ten</sup> Jahrhunderts*, vol. i. p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> *Deutsche Geschichte im 19<sup>ten</sup> Jahrhundert*, vol. i. p. 667.

<sup>4</sup> *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen der deutschen Constituirenden Nationalversammlung*, vol. ii. p. 1011.

in spite of herself fall into the bosom of "Great Germany," and, speaking of Belgium, he cried:—

That fine country, the ancient Circle of Burgundy, with the powerful bishopric of Liège—five millions of souls. . . . Those German rivers, that nation that willed to be German, were, alas! allowed to be separated from Germany thirty-four years ago. . . . We cherish the hope that those countries which were wrested from us will come back to us, if we ourselves know how to accomplish our task and consider our present situation and its development.

While German patriots and Pan-Germanists continued to cherish plans of future conquest, the soldiers seem to have followed a more practical policy, only considering the eventual lot of Belgium in connection with the necessities of plans of campaign. They too thought of the Meuse as a line of defence, but they considered that it was for Belgium to take the necessary measures to prevent an attack on Germany by the French.

This appears from communications made, at intervals of several years, by the German military attachés at Brussels. In 1855 Colonel Von Olberg, the Prussian military attaché at Brussels, at the time when the plan for the entrenched camp and the enlargement of Antwerp was being elaborated, strongly protested against this design, and maintained that it was the Meuse that should be fortified and defended. In February 1875 Major Von Sommerfeldt, the military attaché at the German Legation, in an interview with Baron Lambertont, "kept on repeating to the latter, in terms almost of entreaty, that Namur and Liège must be put into a state of defence. . . . He himself made the remark that these works were doubly indispensable, as much for the case of an army coming from Germany as for that of an army coming from France." Baron Lambertont, reporting this conversation, added, "In fine, I cannot better sum up the thoughts of my interviewer than by repeating his own expression, 'All that we ask of you is to hold out for five days. If that is done, your task will be over. What remains is our concern.'"<sup>2</sup>

These apparently well-meant counsels had no sequel. Bismarck's accession to power was inaugurated by a Franco-Prussian Entente, concluded about the end of 1865. Belgium immediately became the object of incessant attacks both from Paris and from Berlin. There can be no doubt as to the responsibility of Bismarck for these intrigues. The defeat of Sedan put an end to whatever projects Napoleon III may have had concerning Belgium. But the hostility of Bismarck towards Belgium did not diminish during the War of 1870. In spite of the promise which he made to England, in the treaties of which we have already spoken, to respect Belgian neutrality,<sup>3</sup> our country was by his inspiration subjected to most violent attacks in Germany. The Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. d'Anethan, even judged it

<sup>1</sup> *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen der deutschen Constituirenden Nationalversammlung*, vol. ii. p. 1021.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Lambertont to P. Devaux of 12th May 1875, quoted by Banning.

<sup>3</sup> The motives which influenced Bismarck in respecting Belgian neutrality are clearly indicated in a letter which he wrote at that time to Baron Nothomb, the Belgian Minister at Berlin: "I am surprised that a man as perspicacious as yourself should think that Bismarck would be naïf enough to throw Belgium into the arms of France." Cf. E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* p. 85.

necessary to have drawn up by Emile Banning, then in the service of the Ministry, a publication entitled *La Belgique et l'Allemagne pendant et après la guerre de 1870* (Brussels, 1870). This was intended to prove the baselessness of the grievances alleged in Germany against Belgium. P. Devaux published a work in German to the same effect: *The Appeal of Belgium to the Calm and Impartial Judgment of Germany* (Brussels, 1870). These hostile manifestations, guided by the official newspapers of Berlin, reached their height in the spring of 1875. At that moment Germany, fearful of a too rapid resurrection of France, was on the point of renewing the struggle with that country. The artificially raised storm against Belgium could have no other object than to prepare public opinion for a military invasion of our country in order to attack France from that side. The war that threatened to break out was prevented by the energetic intervention of Czar Alexander II, who imposed peace and stilled the warlike ardour of Berlin. The German Press campaign ceased at once. It had no longer any object!

But in the meantime military opinion had changed. Belgium was no longer pressed to think of her defence against France. Germany no longer feared a surprise attack by the latter. The General Staff had prepared their plans and were convinced that Germany would be able to take the initiative—to strike the first blow. There was no longer any insistence that Belgium should fortify the Meuse, and it is clear that the German soldiers, on the contrary, did not wish to meet with fortresses in that direction. When asked in November 1876 about the fortification of the Meuse by Belgium, Field-Marshal Von Moltke did not speak in the same tones as the military attachés of 1855 and 1875, whose friendly counsels we have mentioned. He said that from Germany's point of view there was no need for Belgium to make this sacrifice, and that there might even be inconveniences caused by fortifying the Meuse. "That is a question which you must examine from the point of view of the defence of Belgium." That shows that the plans of the General Staff contemplated the possibility of passing through our territory and considered the fortification of the Meuse as an undesirable obstacle. In fact, after the commencement in 1874 of the construction of the Verdun-Belfort line of fortresses by the French, the route of invasion by that way was barred, and the passage through Belgium took the appearance of a strategic necessity.

This idea has become so much stronger since 1876 that in 1882 a well-informed French author<sup>1</sup> could write: "The current opinion in German military circles to-day is that Belgian neutrality would not be respected in the event of a new conflict between France and Germany." This author was not deceived, for in its issue of 4th March 1882 the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, then the official organ of the German Chancellery, discussing General Brialmont's views on the fortification of the Meuse, said: "Germany has no political motive to violate the neutrality of Belgium, but the advantages that might result from it from the military point of view may force her to do so."

This is the theory that "Necessity knows no law," officially adopted at the session of the Reichstag by the German Chancellor. This theory is the consequence of the doctrine of the All-Powerful State

<sup>1</sup> Tenot, *La Frontière*, pp. 311 and 313, Paris, 1882.

preached by Treitschke and adapted to military requirements by Von Bernhardi.

Von Bernhardi took it upon himself to declare the settled intention of the General Staff to violate Belgian neutrality in the event of a Franco-German war. Saturated with the ideas developed by Treitschke as to the absolute power of the State and its duty to disregard all treaty obligations as dangerous to its existence and development, Bernhardi writes, on the question of neutrality: "The conception of permanent neutrality is quite contrary to the essential nature of the State, which can only attain its highest moral development in competition with other States." The practical conclusion of this doctrine is that "France should be so crushed as never to be able to raise itself to hinder us," and that "even at the price of a European war. . . . The neutrality of Belgium will not stop us."<sup>1</sup>

It has been said that Von Bernhardi's influence has been greatly exaggerated on purpose, and that the few phrases in his book that are condemned must not be taken to represent official German opinion.

But it cannot be denied that Von Bernhardi's writings enjoyed great popularity in Germany, and that the German Government has never repudiated the conclusions drawn from his doctrines or refused all responsibility for them. Even if not an official interpreter, Von Bernhardi as a thinker is as representative of the military system of Germany as Admiral Mahan was for the naval circles of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, this same Von Bernhardi has written: "Measures of preparation for war cannot be kept altogether secret; they are taken in the sight and to the knowledge of the whole world." But Germany had "written her intentions in iron," to use the expression of Colonel Boucher. She had constructed a system of strategical railways which in itself corroborates all that Von Bernhardi had written.<sup>3</sup>

If one looks at the map of Western Germany, one will notice a network of railways stretching to some half a dozen points east of Aix-la-Chapelle, like the fingers of an outstretched hand. They link up Aix-la-Chapelle with the North, the East, and the South of Germany. Aix is not a great commercial centre, and the construction of these railways is not explained by the great amount of goods traffic. The extent of bays and platforms does not serve such an object either. These lines are military and strategic. Their direction and the recent formation of the great Camp of Elsenborn, near Malmédy, were intended to facilitate in a great measure the preliminary operations of an offensive through Belgium.<sup>4</sup>

The intentions of Germany were written there, and, to convince us there is no need of the avowal in the *Deutsche Krieger Zeitung*, the

<sup>1</sup> Von Bernhardi, *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg*, vol. ii. p. 434.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Beck, *The Evidence in the Case*, at pp. 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> "The development of the network of transport lines and the construction of unloading platforms on the military frontier, the density and the direction of this network, fix, in point of time and space, the concentration, and consequently the offensive."—R. de Diesbach, "L'Offensive allemande contre la France," in the *Revue militaire suisse*, 1915, vol. lx. p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. de Diesbach, *op. cit.* pp. 67-68.

official organ of the German Military Union, printed in its number for 2nd September 1914 (Edition for the Army in the Field):—

The plan for the invasion of France had been clearly settled for a long time. It had to be pursued with success in the north, through Belgium, thus avoiding the strong line of delaying forts which the enemy (France) had made to defend its frontiers towards Germany, and which it would have been extremely difficult to break through.

In conclusion, let us not forget what was said in the secret report on the reinforcement of the German army dated at Berlin on the 19th March 1913, and on the 2nd April of the same year communicated by an authoritative source to the French Ministry of War. We read:—

But in the next European war it will also be necessary that the small States should be forced to follow us or be subdued. In certain conditions their armies and their fortified places can be rapidly conquered or neutralized; this would probably be the case with Belgium and Holland, so as to prevent our enemy in the West from gaining territory which they could use as a base of operations against our flank.<sup>1</sup>

To sum up, from the moment when, in 1890, Bismarck was forced by William II to give up the direction of affairs and the Emperor resolutely embarked on his policy of world-wide expansion, with his colonies, his fleet, and the increase of his army, the Treaty of 1839, at least in the minds of German soldiers,<sup>2</sup> had become the "scrap of paper"<sup>3</sup> so disdainfully mentioned by Von Bethmann-Hollweg in his historic interview with the British Ambassador.

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 2 and annexe.

<sup>2</sup> In the report of his interview on the 5th August 1914 with Herr Zimmermann, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs at Berlin, the Belgian Minister (Baron Beyens) writes: "Herr Zimmermann simply replied that the Department for Foreign Affairs was powerless. Since the order for mobilization had been issued by the Emperor, all power now belonged to the military authorities. It was they who had considered the invasion of Belgium to be an indispensable operation of war."—Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 52. See Baron Beyens's article entitled "L'Armée et la marine allemande—Le parti de la guerre," in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of 1st April 1915.

<sup>3</sup> In his book *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg*, published at the end of 1911, Von Bernhardt wrote (at p. 169) that "neutrality is only a paper rampart." See, for the policy of Germany during the reign of William II, the book of Baron Beyens, *L'Allemagne avant la guerre*, Paris and Brussels, 1915.

## CHAPTER III

### THE VIOLATION OF LAW<sup>1</sup>

On the 28th June 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, the Duchess of Hohenberg, were assassinated at Serajevo. Austria seized upon this as an excellent pretext for commencing the attack on Serbia which had been frustrated the year before by the refusal of Italy to co-operate.<sup>2</sup> On the 23rd July she presented an ultimatum to Serbia, to which the Servian Government replied by a note which, in spite of the great concessions made by it, was considered by Austria as insufficient. Five days later, on the 28th July, the latter Power declared war on Serbia.<sup>3</sup>

The Chancelleries realized that Europe was threatened with a war of the nations.

As soon as M. Davignon, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, received, through the Minister of Belgium at Vienna, the text of the Austrian ultimatum, he took all the necessary steps to secure respect for Belgian neutrality in the event of war breaking out. On the 23rd July he sent detailed instructions to the Belgian Ministers at Paris, Berlin, London, Vienna, and St. Petersburg (Petrograd).

This despatch said:—

The Belgian Government have had under their consideration whether, in present circumstances, it would not be advisable to address to the Powers who guarantee Belgian independence and neutrality a communication assuring them of Belgium's determination to fulfil the international obligations imposed upon her by treaty in the event of a war breaking out on her frontiers.

The Government have come to the conclusion that such a communication would be premature at present, but that events might move rapidly and not leave sufficient time to forward suitable instructions at the desired moment to the Belgian representatives abroad.<sup>4</sup>

These instructions were therefore sent off at once, and the Belgian Ministers abroad were to communicate them to the Governments to which they were accredited only on receipt of a subsequent communication from M. Davignon.

When the Belgian Government learned of the declaration of war by Austria on Serbia, they at once decided to put the army on a

<sup>1</sup> For the very abundant literature to which the violation of Belgian neutrality gave rise, consult the bibliographical list published in the Belgian *Cahiers documentaires* (2nd Ser., Part 20, No. 79; 3rd Ser., Part 29, No. 119; Part 30, No. 119; 4th Ser., Part 34, No. 133).

<sup>2</sup> Statement by Signor Giolitti to the Italian Parliament in December 1914. See *The Times* of 11th December 1914, article entitled "Signor Giolitti's Disclosures."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. i. pp. 35 et seq., London, 1915.

<sup>4</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 2 and annex.



strengthened peace footing. In order that this measure should not be misconstrued abroad, the Belgian Ministers accredited to the different Courts were to explain that there was no question of mobilization, and that the strengthened peace-footing had no other object than to provide the Belgian army with effectives analogous to those of the corps maintained in permanence in frontier areas by neighbouring Powers.<sup>1</sup>

Events rapidly developed. On the 31st July the general mobilization decreed by Austria was followed by a proclamation of a "State of Danger of War" in Germany. At 7 p.m. on the same day the Belgian Government, in its turn, proceeded to a general mobilization.

During the course of that day M. Klobukowski, the French Minister at Brussels, came and showed M. Davignon a telegram of the Havas Agency announcing that Germany had proclaimed a state of danger of war, and took the opportunity of declaring that France would not send troops into Belgium, although large forces might be concentrated on the frontiers of that country.<sup>2</sup> This official communication doubtless caused great satisfaction to the Belgian Government, which at that time cherished the hope that Germany would take up the same attitude. They knew<sup>3</sup> that England, in view of the possibility of a European war, had asked the French and German Governments separately whether each of them was prepared to respect the neutrality of Belgium.<sup>4</sup> They awaited a favourable reply from the German Government, being informed that the German Minister at Brussels had that morning made a statement—giving, it is true, his personal opinion—that the friendly sentiments of Germany and her desire to respect Belgian neutrality remained unchanged.<sup>5</sup>

On the next day, the 1st August, the French Government announced that it would respect the neutrality of Belgium.<sup>6</sup> The news from Germany was not so satisfactory. Herr Von Jagow had, it seemed, said that he could not answer the question whether Germany would respect the neutrality of this country.<sup>7</sup>

On the instructions of M. Davignon the Belgian Ministers in foreign countries then communicated the following declaration, which had been in their possession since the 24th July:—

The international situation is serious, and the possibility of a war between several Powers naturally preoccupies the Belgian Government.

Belgium has most scrupulously observed the duties of a neutral State imposed upon her by the treaties of 19th April 1839; and those duties she will strive unflinchingly to fulfil, whatever the circumstances may be.

<sup>1</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 11; French Yellow Book, No. 119.

<sup>4</sup> English Blue Book, No. 115.

<sup>5</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 12.

<sup>6</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 122. Cf. First Belgian Grey Book, No. 13; English Blue Book, No. 125. It appears from this last document that President Poincaré had given an earlier assurance in the course of an interview with King Albert. The same assurance was given to the Belgian Minister at Paris in 1913. Cf. Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 1.

<sup>7</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 14; French Yellow Book, No. 123. In reference to this the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs remarks: "The latter fact did not particularly affect me, since the declaration of the German Government might appear superfluous in view of existing treaties" (First Belgian Grey Book, No. 38).

The friendly feelings of the Powers towards her have been so often reaffirmed that Belgium confidently expects that her territory will remain free from any attack, should hostilities break out upon her frontiers.

All necessary steps to ensure respect of Belgian neutrality have nevertheless been taken by the Government. The Belgian army has been mobilized and is taking up such strategic positions as have been chosen to secure the defence of the country and the respect of its neutrality. The forts of Antwerp and on the Meuse have been put in a state of defence.

It is scarcely necessary to dwell upon the nature of these measures. They are intended solely to enable Belgium to fulfil her international obligations; and it is obvious that they neither have been nor can have been undertaken with any intention of taking part in an armed struggle between the Powers or from any feeling of distrust of any of those Powers.

In accordance with my instructions, I have the honour to communicate to your Excellency a copy of the declaration by the Belgian Government, and to request that you will be good enough to take note of it.

Next morning the Belgian people could read in their newspapers that the Germans had seized the railways and the capital of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, and that Germany had declared war on Russia. The news did not alarm the people, nor had the mobilization caused the slightest anxiety. Every one thought, "They will not fight here. It will be just as in 1870."

The occupation of Luxemburg doubtless boded no good, but had they not the reassuring statement made to a journalist by the German Minister himself: "You may perhaps see your neighbour's roof in flames, but your own house will not catch fire"? Moreover, Captain Brinckmann, the German military attaché, had rushed to the telephone to ask *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* newspaper to deny at once that Germany had declared war on France, or even on Russia. This is M. F. Neuray's, the editor's, account of the affair<sup>1</sup>:—

There were four of us in the editor's room. It was warm, and the flies were buzzing and hitting against the frames of the windows, which were wide open. When Captain Brinckmann made his communication to me, I still trusted in the word of German officers. His metallic voice could be clearly heard through the instrument: "Sir, I beg you, deny at once, and in your largest type, the news which our enemies are spreading. There has been no declaration of war on Russia nor on France. You can say that this denial comes from me."

"And the Grand Duchy, Captain?"

"What's that?"

"Yesterday evening your troops crossed the Grand Ducal frontier."

"I don't know a word about that. It is probably a mistake by a patrol. Besides, there can be no possible comparison. You know we have interests in the Grand Ducal railways. It would not be surprising if certain precautions were taken, but you must not deduce any conclusions about Belgium from that. . . ."

At the Foreign Office, however, serious fears were entertained. On the 31st July the Minister of Luxemburg at Brussels had communicated to the Belgian Government the assurances given by the Government at Berlin to his country.<sup>2</sup> In spite of those assurances, the Grand Duchy had been invaded.<sup>3</sup> What value, then, could be

<sup>1</sup> See *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 1st-2nd August 1915. A summarized and slightly different version of this interview is given by E. Waxweiler, op. cit. pp. 39-40. The personal recollection of M. Neuray must obviously be preferred.

<sup>2</sup> See *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 1st-2nd August 1915, in the article "Un an après."

<sup>3</sup> See F. van den Steen de Jehay, "Comment s'est faite l'invasion du grand duché de Luxemburg" in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for 1st November 1915 at p. 75 et seq.

attached to the prognostication made that very morning by Herr von Below Saleske, the Minister of Germany? He had been informed of the communiqué of France on the question of her respect for Belgian neutrality. Meeting M. Davignon, the German Minister thanked him, adding that up till then he had not been charged with any official communication on the same matter, but that "we knew his personal opinion as to the feelings of security which we had the right to entertain towards our eastern neighbours."<sup>1</sup>

For the people of Brussels, the afternoon slipped by like the afternoon of all Sundays in August. In the lower town a crowd of countryfolk and provincials crowded the narrow streets, whilst towards the Wood, towards Tervueren, and towards all the pleasure resorts of the suburbs, happy families were journeying to enjoy the Sabbath rest.

But a fateful hour was about to strike. At the moment when the musical societies were returning to the city from their country excursions, their instruments playing some popular march, and the excursionists, invigorated by the fresh air, were returning cheerfully from the Wood with their children, tired out by their play, the Minister of Germany proceeded to the Foreign Office. He presented himself at seven o'clock, bringing at last an official communication from his Government.

It was an ultimatum, and the text ran:—

*(Very Confidential.)*

Reliable information has been received by the German Government to the effect that French forces intend to march on the line of the Meuse by Givet and Namur. This information leaves no doubt as to the intention of France to march through Belgian territory against Germany.

The German Government cannot but fear that Belgium, in spite of the utmost goodwill, will be unable, without assistance, to repel so considerable a French invasion with sufficient prospect of success to afford an adequate guarantee against danger to Germany. It is essential for the self-defence of Germany that she should anticipate any such hostile attack. The German Government would, however, feel the deepest regret if Belgium regarded as an act of hostility against herself the fact that the measures of Germany's opponents force Germany, for her own protection, to enter Belgian territory.

In order to exclude any possibility of misunderstanding, the German Government make the following declaration:—

1. Germany has in view no act of hostility against Belgium. In the event of Belgium being prepared in the coming war to maintain an attitude of friendly neutrality towards Germany, the German Government bind themselves, at the conclusion of peace, to guarantee the possessions and independence of the Belgian Kingdom in full.

2. Germany undertakes, under the above-mentioned condition, to evacuate Belgian territory on the conclusion of peace.

3. If Belgium adopts a friendly attitude, Germany is prepared, in co-operation with the Belgian authorities, to purchase all necessaries for her troops against a cash payment, and to pay an indemnity for any damage that may have been caused by German troops.

4. Should Belgium oppose the German troops, and in particular should she throw difficulties in the way of their march by a resistance of the fortresses on the Meuse, or by destroying railways, roads, tunnels, or other similar works, Germany will, to her regret, be compelled to consider Belgium as an enemy.

In this event, Germany can undertake no obligations towards Belgium, but the eventual adjustment of the relations between the two States must be left to the decision of arms.

<sup>1</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 19.

The German Government, however, entertain the distinct hope that this eventuality will not occur, and that the Belgian Government will know how to take the necessary measures to prevent the occurrence of incidents such as those mentioned. In this case the friendly ties which bind the two neighbouring States will grow stronger and more enduring.<sup>1</sup>

This note did not bear the heading "Very Confidential" without a reason. It proposed to Belgium that she should secretly barter her honour for sounding phrases and a few promises, the intentional vagueness and want of precision of which put little obligation on the Government which formulated them.<sup>2</sup>

The communication of the German proposal greatly affected the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs. He at once sent to inform M. de Broqueville, President of the Council and Minister for War. While awaiting his arrival, they commenced to translate the German text of the ultimatum. The translator had completed about a third of his task when M. de Broqueville arrived. The translation was read. There was silence for some minutes. Then Baron van der Elst, General Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, broke the silence. "Well, sir, are we ready?" None thought for a moment of any other answer than unconditional resistance.

After a pause, M. de Broqueville replied: "We are ready. The mobilization is being carried out under wonderful conditions. Although begun only yesterday morning, it is nearly completed. To-morrow evening the army will be ready to march . . . to-morrow morning even, if it is absolutely necessary. But—there is a 'But'—we have not yet got our heavy artillery."<sup>3</sup>

It was then 8.10 p.m., and it was time to inform the King and obtain authority to summon the Council to the Palace for nine o'clock, and also to call a meeting there of the Ministers of State for ten o'clock. The decision, which involved responsibilities such as Belgium had never known in the course of her history, could not be delayed. Germany allowed just twelve hours for reflection. Delivered at 7 p.m., the ultimatum asked for a reply by seven the next morning.

The meeting was held at the Royal Palace.<sup>4</sup> It was delayed by circumstances. Some of the Ministers, who had been called away to the provinces on urgent business, had not returned. This was notably the case with M. Berryer, who had gone to Liège on a mission to General Leman, the military governor of that place. He was obliged

<sup>1</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 20. The original German text will be found there. M. H. Davignon gives a photographic reproduction of a part of the German ultimatum at p. 8 of his *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*. It is interesting to note that the last two paragraphs of the German ultimatum are not reproduced in the Second German White Book, which contains the official text. As these did not agree with the later statement of Herr von Bothmann-Hollweg, according to whom the fact that Belgium had sold her neutrality to the Entente was known in Germany before the war, the German Government simply suppressed them. See F. Passeleq, *Le second Livre Blanc allemand* (Critical Essay and Notes on the Official Alteration of Belgian Documents) (*Pages d'Histoire*), Paris, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Read the penetrating analysis by E. Waxweiler (op. cit. pp. 45 et seq.) on the subject of the ultimatum.

<sup>3</sup> See A. de Bassompierre: "La nuit du 2 au 3 août 1914 au Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de Belgique," in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for 15th February 1916 at p. 884 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> See, for what follows, the *Courrier de l'Armée* of 3rd August 1915.

to meet a number of civilian and military authorities at the General's house, and to take certain steps dictated by the possibility of a sudden attack. All this required time. Having embraced his mother, M. Berryer put his motor on the fourth speed and hastened to the capital. He reached Brussels at midnight. His permanent secretary at once informed him of the grave news of the evening, and told him that he was expected at the Palace, where his colleagues were already in council under the presidency of the King. In the Grand Salon were gathered all the Ministers and some of the high officials of the Foreign Office.

Did the Ministers thus assembled recall at that moment the statements recently made at Berlin at an interview between the French Ambassador and Herr von Jagow, in the course of which the latter, having suggested to France the taking of the Congo from Belgium, developed, in the expansiveness of an after-dinner conversation, his notions as to the fate of the smaller States? In his view, the smaller States could no longer maintain, owing to the transformation which was taking place in Europe to the advantage of the stronger nations in consequence of the development of economic forces and of means of communication, the independent existence they had hitherto enjoyed. They were destined either to disappear or be drawn into the orbit of the Great Powers.

Other memories and other comparisons doubtless came back to the minds of Ministers during this historic night. But they lost no time in vain reflections. The Royal Council had been unanimous from the start. On the principle of the reply to be given there had been no discordant voice, no shadow of hesitation.<sup>2</sup> Belgium, honest and loyal for more than eighty years, could only make one reply to Germany, and that reply: "You shall not pass." Honour and interest both dictated this attitude.

In the meantime, the young officers at the Palace became impatient: the Council was lasting too long for their liking. They trembled to see time, needed for the concentration of troops, pass in consideration and discussion which to them seemed useless. At one time the rumour got about that the Council, while refusing to give a passage to Germany, had decided not to fight, and that the army was to be ordered to concentrate under Antwerp. There was an explosion of anger. Sinking into a chair, one captain began to sob bitterly. Another paced up and down the ante-room calling out at the top of his voice, "It isn't true. I tell you it isn't true!"<sup>3</sup>

During this time, outside the Palace, belated groups of inhabitants were returning from their country excursions in the fine summer evening. One heard the fresh laughter of young girls, popular songs, the wailing of sleepy children, here and there the tremulous voice of a drunken man.

<sup>1</sup> See the letter on this sent by Baron Beyens, in the Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 2. The letter is dated 2nd April 1914.

<sup>2</sup> See on this matter A. de Bassompierre, *op. cit.* p. 893, note 1. The first part of the sitting, which was adjourned at midnight and shortly afterwards continued until 4 a.m., was taken up with the discussion of the general sense of the negative reply to be made to Germany, but the greater part of the time was occupied by the reading of Staff reports on the military situation of the country.

<sup>3</sup> See *Le XXe Siècle* of 1st-2nd August 1915.

Towards midnight the sitting of the Council was suspended and a drafting committee was appointed to go to the Foreign Office to compose a draft reply to the ultimatum. When this committee, which consisted of Ministers de Broqueville, Davignon, Carton de Wiart, van den Heuvel, and Hymans, with Baron van der Elst, reached the Ministry, a surprise awaited them.

At nine o'clock Baron de Gaiffier, Political Director-General at the Foreign Office, had on his own initiative set to work on a draft reply. Adopting the universal opinion, he considered that only one reply was possible: "No." Consequently his draft corresponded so exactly to the wishes of the Council that the drafting committee were content to alter a few expressions and to adopt it almost entirely.<sup>1</sup>

The version of Baron de Gaiffier, almost unaltered, first recalled the text of the ultimatum and proceeded:—

This note has made a deep and painful impression upon the Belgian Government.

The intentions attributed to France by Germany are in contradiction to the formal declarations made to us on August 1st in the name of the French Government.

Moreover, if, contrary to our expectation, Belgian neutrality should be violated by France, Belgium intends to fulfil her international obligations, and the Belgian army would offer the most vigorous resistance to the invader.

The treaties of 1839, confirmed by the treaties of 1870, vouch for the independence and neutrality of Belgium under the guarantee of the Powers, and notably of the Government of His Majesty the King of Prussia.

Belgium has always been faithful to her international obligations, she has carried out her duties in a spirit of loyal impartiality, and she has left nothing undone to maintain and enforce respect for her neutrality.

The attack upon her independence with which the German Government threaten her constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. No strategic interest justifies such a violation of law.

The Belgian Government, if they were to accept the proposals submitted to them, would sacrifice the honour of the nation and betray their duty towards Europe.

Conscious of the part which Belgium has played for more than eighty years in the civilization of the world, they refuse to believe that the independence of Belgium can only be preserved at the price of the violation of her neutrality.

If this hope is disappointed the Belgian Government are firmly resolved to repel, by all the means in their power, every attack upon their rights.<sup>2</sup>

About four o'clock the Ministers left the Palace. The sky was inky dark, but a pale light was beginning to gleam on the horizon. The King said: "Gentlemen, it is a very gloomy day that is breaking. . . ." Then, after a pause, he added, "Yet it shows the signs of being a brilliant day."<sup>3</sup>

Albert I was alluding to events. He looked forward, past the hours of gloom, to the dawn of victory.

The reply of Belgium constitutes, indeed, one of the noblest documents known to the history of diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> M. de Gaiffier went in person to deliver it, proceeding to the German Embassy on foot. Seven o'clock struck. Herr von Below read it in an unconcerned manner, and then asked the Belgian emissary if he had any verbal

<sup>1</sup> A. de Bassompierre, *op. cit.* pp. 898-9. The draft was submitted to the Council at 2 a.m. and definitely accepted, under the presidency of the King.

<sup>2</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Courrier de l'Armée* of 3rd August 1915.

<sup>4</sup> This is what Mr. Beck, the former Assistant Attorney-General of the United States, calls it in his book *The Evidence in the Case* at p. 207.

addition to make. Upon his reply in the negative, the interview ended.<sup>1</sup>

The night passed at the Ministry of War in making preparations for sending the archives to Antwerp. At 4.15 a.m. M. de Broqueville, calm and unmoved, re-entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two or three journalists came to get news. The country had to be informed of the historic event that had just occurred. On the corner of a table was hurriedly written out the ten-line note which was to announce that little Belgium defied the most formidable military Power in the world.<sup>2</sup>

This communiqué at first produced a feeling of stupefaction among the public. Then the feeling of security engendered by long years of peace regained the upper hand. Confidence succeeded the first vague feeling of disquietude. People told one another, "It is a piece of bluff. The Germans want to intimidate us. When they learn that they won't be allowed to cross, they won't insist." At most it was thought that they might try to cross by Luxemburg, which was known to be empty of troops.

It was not known that already, on the 29th July,<sup>3</sup> the Imperial Chancellor had informed the British Ambassador that henceforward the fate of the little country, whose neutrality Germany herself had guaranteed, was at the mercy of military operations, and that she was occupied in using this neutrality as a price to secure England's abstinence from the conflict.<sup>4</sup> There was no idea that, from the earliest moment that Germany had pronounced the name of Belgium, in a conflict which was no concern of the latter, she had settled her plan: "Place Belgium under the duty to defend herself, and then subdue her as a punishment for having done her duty."<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the Belgian Government decided to maintain a correct and irreproachable attitude until the last moment. On the 3rd August M. Klobukowski, the French Minister, came to M. Davignon about midday and said to him:—

Although I have received no instructions to make a declaration from my Government, I feel justified, in view of their well-known intentions, in saying that if the Belgian Government were to appeal to the French Government as one of the Powers guaranteeing their neutrality, the French Government would at once respond to Belgium's appeal; if such an appeal were not made it is probable that—unless, of course, exceptional measures were rendered necessary in self-defence—the French Government would not intervene until Belgium had taken some effective measure of resistance.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. de Bassompierre, *op. cit.* p. 900.

<sup>2</sup> *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 1st-2nd August 1915.

<sup>3</sup> English Blue Book, No. 85.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* p. 91 et seq.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.* p. 116. See for the proof, *ibid.*, p. 91 et seq.

<sup>6</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, Nos. 24 and 38; French Yellow Book, No. 142. A legend has grown up about this to the effect that the French Government offered to send at once five French Army Corps. This proposal was never made. In the first place, it would be curious if the French military attaché had made such an offer at a time when the Minister of France stated that he was without instructions from his Government. Again, the diplomatic correspondence published by the French and Belgian Governments contains no allusion to this subject. The proposal must have shown some traces in this correspondence, had it really been made. Lastly, as M. A. de Bassompierre remarks (*op. cit.* p. 901, note 1), the dispositions of the French

The Belgian Minister, while appreciating M. Klobukowski's statement, did not for the moment adopt the suggestion.

As Germany had not yet committed any act of war, the Belgian Cabinet decided that there was at present no occasion to appeal to the guaranteeing Powers.<sup>1</sup> At midday M. Davignon made this decision known to the Belgian representatives at the Courts of Paris, Berlin, London, Vienna, and St. Petersburg (Petrograd).<sup>2</sup>

Acting in the same way, the King sent a telegram to the King of England in which he contented himself with making a supreme appeal for "diplomatic" intervention by the English Government to safeguard Belgian neutrality.<sup>3</sup>

Desiring to remain correct until the last moment, Belgium for the time being refused all military assistance from the guaranteeing Powers. She, however, reserved the right to come to a decision later on as to what should be done. Yet she had a great satisfaction in store, for the Count de Lalaing telegraphed from London that Sir Edward Grey had told him that "if our neutrality is violated it means war with Germany."<sup>4</sup>

Next day, the 4th August, was a day full of stirring events. At 6 a.m. the German Minister drew up a letter, bringing to the notice of the Belgian Government that, as Belgium intended to oppose the passage of German troops, "the latter, to their deep regret, find themselves compelled to take—if necessary by force of arms—those measures of defence already foreshadowed as indispensable, in view of the menace of France."<sup>5</sup>

The die was cast. The powerful German Empire, violating her plighted word and repudiating her signature, was about to fall with all her might upon the small country which refused to forfeit her honour.

A short time after the German declaration had been delivered to M. Davignon, a truly pathetic scene occurred at Berlin itself. About eight o'clock in the evening the Belgian Minister at the German Court, Baron Beyens, received a telegram from his Government instructing him to ask for a verbal explanation from Herr von Jagow of the unjustifiable act of the Imperial Government. Baron Beyens attended at the German Ministry before the staff had arrived. It was nine o'clock in the morning.

We should reproach ourselves if we did not reproduce here in its original form the account which the Belgian Minister has given of this historic interview.<sup>6</sup>

"Well, what have you to say to me?" These were his [von Jagow's] first words as he hurried to meet me.

troops at the time would not have permitted the despatch of five Army Corps to Belgium.

The error rests on a communication from the British Minister at Brussels which appears in the English Blue Book, No. 151. Its form, when compared with No. 142 of the French Yellow Book, proves that the British Minister must have been referring to M. Klobukowski's proposal, but he confused it with an imaginary proposal of the French military attaché. The error is probably due to some erroneous communication hurriedly made by the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>1</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., No. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., No. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., No. 27.

<sup>6</sup> A first summarized account of this interview was sent by Baron Beyens on the 5th August (Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 25). Later, after he reached England, the Belgian Minister hastened to draw up a more detailed report. This is the one which we publish here. It bears date the 21st September, and forms document No. 51 in the Second Belgian Grey Book.



"I have to ask you for explanations in regard to the ultimatum which the German Minister handed on Sunday evening to my Government. I suppose you have some reason to give in explanation of such action."

"An absolute necessity forced us to present that demand to you. It is with mortal grief that the Emperor and his Government have had to resign themselves to doing so. To myself it is the most painful resolution and the most cruel thing I have had to do throughout my career. But the passage through Belgium is for Germany a question of life and death. She must be finished with France as quickly as possible, crush her completely so as then to be able to turn against Russia, otherwise she herself will be caught between the hammer and the anvil. We have learned that the French army was preparing to pass through Belgium and to attack us on our flank. We must reestablish her."

"But," I answered, "you are in direct contact with France on a frontier of 200 kilometres; why in order to settle your quarrel did you need to turn aside and pass through our country?"

"The French frontier is too strongly fortified, and we are obliged," he repeated "to act very quickly before Russia has had time to mobilize her army."

"Contrary to what you think, France has given us a formal promise to respect our neutrality, provided that you respect it too. What would you have said if, instead of making us this promise of her own accord, she had presented to us the same summons before you, if she had demanded a passage through our country, and if we had yielded to her threats? That we were cowards, incapable of defending our neutrality and unworthy of an independent existence?"

Herr von Jagow did not reply to this question.

"Have you," I continued, "anything with which to reproach us? Have we not always correctly and scrupulously fulfilled the duties which the neutrality of Belgium imposed upon us with regard to Germany as well as the other guarantee Powers? Since the foundation of our kingdom have we not been loyal and trustworthy neighbours to you?"

"Germany has nothing with which to reproach Belgium, whose attitude has always been correct."

"And so, in recognition of our loyalty, you wish to make of our country the battlefield for your struggle with France, the battlefield of Europe; and we know what devastation modern warfare brings with it! Have you thought of that?"

"If the Belgian army," the Secretary of State replied, "allows us to pass freely, without destroying the railways, without blowing up the bridges and tunnels, and if it retires on Antwerp without attempting to defend Liège, we promise not only to respect the independence of Belgium, the lives and property of the inhabitants, but also to indemnify you for the loss incurred."

"Sir," I replied, "the Belgian Government, conscious of its duties towards all the guarantors of its neutrality, can make no reply to such a proposal other than the reply which it has made without hesitation. The whole nation will support its King and its Government. You must recognize yourself that no other reply was possible."

As I urged him to speak, Herr von Jagow, in face of my persistence, ended by saying: "I recognize it. I understand your reply. I understand it as private individual, but as Secretary of State I have no opinion to express." And then he repeated the expression of his grief at having come to such a point after so many years of friendly relationship. But a rapid march through Belgium was for Germany a question of life or death. We in our turn should understand that.

I answered immediately: "Belgium would have lost her honour if she had listened to you, and no nation, any more than an individual, can live without honour. Europe will be our judge. And besides," I added, "you will not take Liège as easily as you think, and you will have to meet England, the faithful guarantor of our neutrality."

At these words Herr von Jagow shrugged his shoulders, an action which could be interpreted in two ways. It signified: "What an idea! It is impossible!" Or, perhaps: "The lot is cast, we cannot go back."

I added, before retiring, that I was ready to leave Berlin with my staff and to ask for my passports. "But I cannot break my relations with you in this way," cried the Secretary of State; "perhaps there will still be something for us to talk over."

"It is for my Government to take a decision about that," I replied; "it does not depend upon you or me. I will wait for their orders to ask for my passports."

As I left Herr von Jagow after this painful interview, which was to be our last, I carried away the impression that he had expected something else when I had asked to see him, some unforeseen proposal, perhaps the request to allow the Belgian army to retire in security to Antwerp after having made a show of resistance on the Meuse and having, on the invasion of the country, formally defended the principles of her neutrality. After my first words, the face of the speaker seemed to me to betray a feeling of disappointment, and his persistence in telling me not to break our relations yet strengthened this idea which I had had from the start of our conversation.

While this tragic interview was taking place at the German Foreign Office, Brussels was seething with excitement. The hour when the Belgian Parliament was to hold its last sitting was drawing nigh. This sitting was held in the Hall of the Chamber, where the members of the Senate and the Chamber had taken up their position mingled together in a way that the gravity of the situation alone could explain. The streets were filled with an excited crowd, which hastened in huge masses to the Rue de la Loi. The King, accompanied by the Queen and the Royal Family, was to be present at this solemn sitting. The arrival of the Sovereign was awaited with ill-concealed impatience, and people burned with desire to hear the words of a speech, the theme and motive of which every one realized. The noble phrases of the reply to the German ultimatum had aroused feelings unknown a little while before, sentiments of great patriotic pride mingled with and intensified by deep emotion.

The sitting had been decided upon during the night of the 2nd August.<sup>1</sup> The members had been summoned by telegram. It was with difficulty that they reached the Palais de la Nation, several of them having had to have recourse to emergency methods of reaching Brussels. More than one arrived after the sitting was over.

Some of the deputies from the frontier, especially those from Verviers, entered the Chamber quite overcome. Their eyes were full of fear. They had seen, as in a flash of lightning, during the rapid transit of the motor-cars that brought them to Brussels, the work of the military engineers preparing for defence against invasion. Explosions and the flames of burning buildings had struck agony into their hearts. The tunnels were being blown up to block the way, and farms were set ablaze so as to afford a clear field of fire.

At Brussels the Place du Palais de la Nation was black with people. Soon the echoes of frantic applause rose above the city—the Royal cortège was arriving. The King advanced through the compact ranks of the crowd, which thrilled at the sight and was overcome by its simple grandeur. He was mounted and wearing service uniform. Behind him, in a carriage, came the Queen and the three Royal children. A wave of enthusiasm swept over the spectators: Flemish and Walloon, Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals, all felt that they had but one soul—the soul of the nation, the Belgian soul which had at last been revealed in her. With the country in danger, all the disputes of the time of peace were hushed.

As the King ascended the great staircase which leads to the Hall of the Chamber, a tear shone in his eye.<sup>2</sup> He recovered himself, and holding high his head, with energy in his face and firmness in his

<sup>1</sup> *Courrier de l'Armée* of 5th August 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

steps, he passed through the offices of the Chamber amid thunders of shouts and cheers. The platforms were crammed with people, who never ceased their manifestations of patriotic enthusiasm.

Suddenly a profound silence fell. The King was standing there, ready to read his speech. And in the midst of that silence, in which one could almost hear the beating of hearts, there slowly fell these well-scanned words, pronounced in a steady voice<sup>1</sup>:—

Gentlemen,—Never since 1830 has there been so grave an hour for Belgium. The integrity of our land is threatened.

The very strength of our right, the sympathy with which Belgium, proud of her free institutions and moral conquests, has always been regarded by other nations, and the need that the balance of power in Europe has for our independent existence, give us hope that the events which threaten will not happen.

But if our hope is vain, if we must resist an invasion of our land and defend our threatened homes, we must, no matter how hard it may be, be found armed and ready for the greatest sacrifices.

Now, ready for any fate, our valiant youth has risen, firmly resolved to defend with the Belgian's traditional tenacity and calm our country in her danger.

In the name of the Nation I greet you as brethren. Everywhere, in Flanders and in Wallonia, in the towns and in the country, one thought alone impels our hearts, Patriotism; one single vision fills our minds, our threatened independence; one duty alone is imposed on our wills, an obstinate resistance.

In these grave circumstances two virtues are indispensable: cool but steady courage and union among all Belgians.

Both have already been confirmed in strength under the eyes of the nation, which is filled with enthusiasm.

The perfectly conducted mobilization of our army, the multitudes of voluntary enlistments, the devotion of the civilian population, and the self-denial of families have shown in an undeniable manner the sustaining valour which uplifts the Belgian people.

The time for action has arrived.

I have called you together, gentlemen, so that the Legislative Houses may be able to associate themselves with the feeling of the people in the same spirit of sacrifice.

You will know how to deal at once, gentlemen, with all the measures, both for war and for the public safety, that the situation requires.

When I see this assembly, in which there is now but one party, the party of our country, where all hearts beat as one, my thoughts go back to the Congress of 1830, and I ask you, Are you inflexibly resolved to maintain intact the sacred heritage of our fathers?

No one in this country will fail in his duty.

The army, strong and disciplined, has risen to its task. My Government and I have full confidence in its leaders and in the soldiers.

Firmly linked with the people, and sustained by them, the Government realizes its responsibilities and will shoulder them until the end in the confident belief that the efforts of all, joined together in the most fervent and generous patriotism, will safeguard the supreme well-being of the country.

If the foreigner, disregarding our neutrality, all the demands of which we have always scrupulously fulfilled, violates our territory, he will find all the Belgians ranged round their Sovereign, who will never betray his constitutional oath, and their Government, in whom the whole nation has absolute confidence.

I have faith in our destiny. A country defending itself is respected by all. That country will not perish.

God be with us and our just cause.

Long live Independent Belgium!

The members of the Assembly and the crowds on the platforms had applauded the most vigorous passages of this speech. Emotion was at its height. As in a flash the multitude saw the past, the present, and

<sup>1</sup> The text of the speeches is taken from the official publication, *The Neutrality of Belgium*, pp. 32-5.

the future of their country. The past: Geoffrey of Bouillon, John I the Victorious, Charles V, Albert and Isabella, whose portraits in the panels decorating the Hall recalled the splendour and glory of bygone Belgium. The present: this young monarch showing himself as the true guide of his people in this hour of anguish. The future: the little Princes ranged about the Queen and watching this sublime spectacle with wondering eyes.

Amid delirious applause the Royal Family left the Parliament.

It was then the turn of the Minister of War to give voice to the feeling of the Assembly in language both vigorous and proud. Outside, the crowd persistently called for M. de Broqueville. A member of Parliament, not prevented by emotion from guarding the traditions of the House, warned the President of the Council that it was his duty to remain in his place. But the call of the multitude became more insistent.<sup>1</sup>

"Go to them," said the Minister of the Interior, "since they call for you." The Minister of War then went into the balcony. "I grieve to inform you," he said, "that the soil of our country has been polluted."<sup>2</sup>

It was true. The Ministry had just received a despatch from the Staff containing the information that the German troops had crossed the frontier at Gemmenich.<sup>3</sup> The crime had been committed.

Angry cries at once rose from the crowd swarming in the street below: "Rifles! To the frontier!"

In the midst of this tumult, these words of M. de Broqueville struck their ears and roused new waves of enthusiasm: "We may be beaten, but we'll never give in."<sup>4</sup>

The spectacle was unique. While the thousands of voices were shouting "To the frontier!" women raised the children in their outstretched arms with a gesture as if of sacrifice and tendered them to the speaker.<sup>5</sup>

When the voice of the Minister again was heard above the din, it resounded: "Belgians! Be worthy of yourselves! Be confident in the justice of your cause. Your King is at your head. He will lead you to victory!"<sup>6</sup>

And those who witnessed this scene, filled with emotion, thought, "The invader may come. A united nation will bar his road."

Almost at the same hour the representatives of the German nation met in the Reichstag to receive from the mouth of the Imperial Chancellor enlightenment on the international situation.

Amid the sustained attention of the gathering there fell these words, cold and cutting in their shameless cynicism:—

We are in a state of legitimate defence, and necessity knows no law.

Our troops have occupied Luxemburg and have perhaps already entered Belgium. This is contrary to the dictates of international law. France has, it is true, declared at Brussels that she was prepared to respect the neutrality of Belgium so long as it

<sup>1</sup> *Courrier de l'Armée* of 5th August 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See the First Belgian Grey Book, No. 30; the French Yellow Book, No. 151; the English Blue Book, Nos. 158 and 159.

<sup>4</sup> *Courrier de l'Armée* of 5th August 1915.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

was respected by her adversary. But we knew that France was ready to invade Belgium. France could wait; we could not. A French attack upon our flank in the region of the Lower Rhine might have been fatal. We were, therefore, compelled to ride roughshod over the legitimate protests of the Governments of Luxemburg and Belgium. For the wrong which we are thus doing, we will make reparation as soon as our military object is attained.<sup>1</sup>

Among all those representatives of the German people who listened to this argument and heard this confession, was there none who leaped up with his heart in revolt and his lips uttering contempt? It seems not.<sup>2</sup>

Charlemagne, in his solitary tomb at Aix-la-Chapelle, must have veiled his face.

The same afternoon, in yet another European capital, London, the representatives of the British nation met to learn the condition of affairs, which were developing with such disconcerting rapidity.

The night before, Sir Edward Grey had placed the matter before the House of Commons, and, speaking of the possible violation of Belgian neutrality by Germany, had said: "If in such a crisis we abandon our honourable undertakings concerning the Belgian Treaty, I doubt whether any material considerations that we might have in view would be of any value compared with the respect that we should lose."<sup>3</sup>

On the afternoon of the 4th August, the English Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, informed the House of Commons of the pathetic appeal that the King of the Belgians had made to King George—which Sir Edward Grey had already mentioned the night before—of the German ultimatum and the reply of Belgium.<sup>4</sup> He added that a telegram had been sent that morning to the British Ambassador at Berlin, saying:—

His Majesty's Government are bound to protest against this violation of a Treaty to which Germany is a party in common with themselves, and must request an assurance that the demand made upon Belgium will not be proceeded with and that her neutrality will be respected by Germany. You should ask for an immediate reply.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Asquith next made the revelation that the German Government, with the intention of deceiving public opinion as to its attitude, had requested its Ambassador at London to remove all doubts that the British Government might feel as to Germany's intentions.<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Not even among the Social Democrats was any one found to utter a protest. Yet the *Vorwärts* had threatened the German Government with the anger of the working classes, and on the 29th July at the International Socialist Congress at the Circus at Brussels, Deputy Haase had made vigorous protests against the participation of Germany in the war. In spite of that, this same Haase, at the sitting of the Reichstag on the 4th August, as Chairman of the Social Democratic Group, read a statement that "Germans threatened with the invasion of their country by enemies had no occasion to consider the reasons for the war; they had only to study the way to defend their frontier." All the Social Democrats voted for the war credits. They uttered no word of protest against the violation of Belgian neutrality, and when the Chancellor announced it they held their peace. See E. Royer, *La Social-Démocratie allemande et austro-hongroise et les socialistes belges*, pp. 29-31 (London, undated); English edition entitled *German Socialists and Belgium* (London, undated).

<sup>3</sup> English Blue Book, Part II. p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 153.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II. pp. 97-8.

German Ambassador was to "repeat in the most positive terms the formal assurance that even in the event of armed conflict with Belgium, Germany would on no account annex Belgian territory." The German Government was imprudent enough to add, "It is obvious that we could not annex Belgian territory with advantage unless we made at the same time territorial gains at the expense of Holland."<sup>1</sup>

The English diplomatists knew what to think of Germany's ultimate respect for the integrity of Belgian territory.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Asquith stated in the House of Commons<sup>3</sup> :—

We have to add this, in the name of H.M. Government. We could in no way regard this as a satisfactory communication. We have in reply repeated the request that we made to that Government last week, that it would give us the same assurance as to Belgian neutrality as that given by France to Belgium and to us, a week ago. We have asked that a reply to this request and a satisfactory answer to the telegram of this morning, which I have just read to the House, shall be given before midnight.<sup>4</sup>

England was true to her plighted word. She did not repudiate her signature.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime the Cabinet at Brussels was deliberating on the question of an appeal to the Powers guaranteeing Belgian neutrality.<sup>6</sup> Though the night before they had declined every suggestion of appeal for help, the situation had now changed. German troops were marching on Liège, having crossed the frontier at several points at the same time. A decision was soon arrived at. During the evening, M. Davignon addressed the following communication to the Ministers of Great Britain, France, and Russia.<sup>7</sup>

The Belgian Government regret to have to announce to your Excellency that this morning the armed forces of Germany entered Belgian territory in violation of treaty engagements.

The Belgian Government are firmly determined to resist by all the means in their power.

Belgium appeals to Great Britain, France, and Russia to co-operate as guaranteeing Powers in the defence of her territory.

There should be concerted and joint action, to oppose the forcible measures taken by Germany against Belgium, and, at the same time, to guarantee the future maintenance of the independence and integrity of Belgium.

Belgium is happy to be able to declare that she will undertake the defence of her fortified places.

Next day, the 5th August, England, France, and Russia made a favourable reply to this appeal and promised their assistance.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the telegram to Count Lichnowsky, German Ambassador at London, in the English Blue Book, No. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* at pp. 91-9.

<sup>3</sup> English Blue Book, Part II. p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> See the telegram sent by Sir Edward Grey to Sir E. Goschen, the British Ambassador at Berlin, in the English Blue Book, No. 159.

<sup>5</sup> The British Ambassador at Berlin was to say that "H.M. Government feel obliged to have recourse to all the means in its power to maintain the neutrality of Belgium, and to observe a Treaty which is as binding on Germany as on ourselves" (English Blue Book, No. 159).

<sup>6</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, No. 38.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 40.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 48, 49 and 52.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BELGIAN ARMY BEFORE THE WAR

BELGIAN neutrality was secured by the guarantee of the Treaty of London.<sup>1</sup> But the worth of this guarantee depended, in a last analysis, upon many circumstances. As long as the guaranteeing Powers were not bound by mutual understandings and were not divided into political groups of such a nature as to cause fear of a European war, confidence could be felt in the guarantee of the treaties relating to Belgian neutrality. If war were limited to two Powers, the effective intervention of a third could always deter the belligerents from committing any breach of that neutrality.

Before the formation of the alliances and understandings that, at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century, ended in the division of Europe into opposing groups of Powers, Belgium had entire confidence in the protecting power of the guarantees of 1839.

This confidence even brought about a feeling of quietude, the signs of which must have caused concern to men of clear vision and to those responsible for the direction of affairs. Under its influence, assisted by the essentially peaceable disposition of the people, every attempt to increase the military resources of the country was energetically opposed. Some politicians, using this eminently national question as a party weapon, indignantly denounced the designs of the "militarists" and would not even have shrunk from the position that the protection of our frontiers should consist of posts bearing on them the text of the Treaty of London, if they had not been afraid of being overwhelmed by ridicule!

Yet there was one who had a clear view of the situation, and dared to face unpopularity in order to prepare for any danger that might threaten our independence and our neutrality. He was King Leopold II.

The impartiality of history will recognize his merit in having understood the danger which threatened in the east, and in having taken measures to construct the forts of the Meuse.

Up to about 1880 it was a maxim of Belgian politics that, in the event of foreign invasion, the Government would retire to Antwerp and hold that stronghold until the guaranteeing Powers—England in particular—should come to our help. It was in conformity with this plan that the fortress of Antwerp was built in 1868, in spite of the recrimination and complaints of a strong opposition.

But in 1880 Leopold II, convinced that the menace would come

<sup>1</sup> On this subject see Ch. De Visscher, *The Neutrality of Belgium*, p. 32 et seq.

from the east at least as much as from the south, conceived the plan of organizing the defence of the Meuse, so as to bar the road of a German army marching against France and also of a French army marching against Germany. At this time Banning published his famous *Memorandum on the Defence of the Meuse*, the prophetic nature of which compels our admiration to-day.

The proposal to fortify the Meuse aroused no more sympathy in the country than the plan for fortifying Antwerp, but the King persisted, and his caustic remark to a member of Parliament who disapproved the plan is well known: "Sir, never go out without an umbrella."

For the execution of his project the King turned to Henri Alexis Brialmont, the celebrated military engineer, who had already the forts of Antwerp to his credit. Born in 1821, Brialmont received his first instruction as a military engineer from French officers. In 1855, however, when he had become a member of the General Staff, he abandoned French models and began to follow the new German theories. He aimed at constructing fortresses capable of resisting the high-angle fire of long-range guns, and rejected the ancient French model of a star with bastioned ramparts and complicated external works in favour of the German type with an extended front and detached forts. Todleben, the celebrated defender of Sebastopol, approved of his plans and confirmed him in his intentions. In 1883 Brialmont designed for the Rumanian Government the gigantic defences of Bucharest. The construction of the forts of the Meuse took from 1888 to 1892. These forts constituted the defences of Liège and Namur. Here is a description from the pen of a competent military critic:—<sup>1</sup>

Brialmont's typical fort, the details of which can be seen in the accompanying sketches, is largely an underground structure. Brialmont's forts are buried in it (the ground). His ordinary design is a low mound, surrounded by a deep ditch, the top of the mound hardly showing above its margin. The mound is cased in concrete and masonry and roofed with concrete, covered with earth and sods. The top is broken by circular pits in which, working like pistons, the "cupolas" or gun turrets slide up and down with just enough movement to bring the gun muzzles above the level of the ground. Internally the mound is like a gigantic molehill hollowed out into passages and chambers. In this subterranean structure are the quarters of the small garrison, the machinery for manœuvring guns and turrets, the stores of ammunition and supplies, the electric lighting arrangements and the ventilating fans. . . . Its garrison . . . obtain access to it by an inclined tunnel.

Liège and Namur were surrounded by a circle of forts of this type, which commanded the principal means of access to the position thus fortified. In war-time the gaps between the forts were to be filled with trenches and redoubts for infantry and with gun emplacements, so as to prevent the attacker from getting inside the ring of defences.

On the embankment of the fort itself, under the cupola, parapets were arranged where infantry could be posted so as to assist the defence of the fort itself.

The diagram opposite will serve to illustrate the above description.

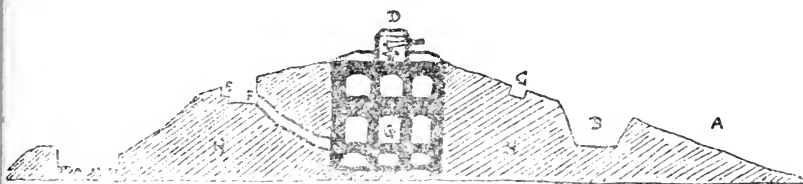
When the construction of the forts of the Meuse was completed in 1892, it was necessary to think of putting the army on a footing correlative to the sacrifices just made for defence works. King

<sup>1</sup> John Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. i. pp. 92-6. Mr. Buchan gives at p. 93 diagrams showing the interior of the forts and a bird's-eye view of their exterior.



Leopold thenceforth endeavoured to supersede the system of drawing lots with the right to pay for a substitute by a more modern arrangement better adapted for the present need. He met with violent opposition. By degrees, however, the international situation became such<sup>1</sup> that those who were entrusted with the country's destinies could no longer ignore the grave problem before them.

The guarantee which had worked so well in 1870 appeared to be subject to the fluctuations of international politics. In 1882 Bismarck, continuing his efforts to isolate France, had succeeded in forming the Triple Alliance. In 1896 France managed to confront this group with her alliance with Russia. The Powers guaranteeing Belgian neutrality gradually lost their complete liberty of action and were henceforward bound by obligations which, though not in conflict with that guarantee, must considerably diminish its value. In Belgium people were concerned at this displacement of forces and influences, but there still remained England, the traditional guardian of Belgian neutrality, who still maintained her disdainful "splendid isolation."



- A. Slope forming the glacis.
- B. Moat.
- C. Infantry trench.
- D. Cupola with disappearing gun.
- E. Infantry trench.
- F. Underground entrance to fort.
- G. Vaults for munitions, etc.
- H. The earth.

THE INTERIOR OF A BRIALMONT FORT.

But the hour came when she, too, was drawn into the vortex. In 1904, under the threat of the German danger, she put an end to her old differences with France by concluding agreements which resulted in the Entente Cordiale. This understanding became more and more intimate, and its strength was revealed during the Moroccan crises of 1905 and 1911. Thanks to the efforts of French diplomacy, it received its natural complement in the Anglo-Russian understanding of 1907.

England's joining of one of the groups contesting the hegemony of Europe alarmed Belgian political circles. England having lost her freedom of action, would she still be able to repeat what she did in 1870?<sup>2</sup> In the chancelleries and military circles of certain capitals, the impression that a European war was becoming imminent grew stronger and stronger.

This menace had cast its shadow over Belgium, especially in 1911

<sup>1</sup> See as to this, *Why we are at War*, by members of the Faculty of Modern History at Oxford, at p. 29 et seq. (2nd ed.).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., P. Hymans in the preface to *La neutralité de la Belgique* at pp. 8-9.

during the Agadir affair and the second Moroccan crisis which formed its sequel.

In the same year Bernhardt published his famous work on the war of to-morrow, *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg*, and made menacing prophecies as to the fate of Belgian neutrality in the event of a Franco-German war.

At last, a solemn warning from a monarch who belonged neither to the Triple Entente nor to the Triple Alliance, whose wisdom and experience were highly valued in the chancelleries of Europe, roused the greatest anxiety. In 1912, King Charles of Rumania gave Belgium a friendly warning that she had to watch the defence of all her frontiers. "The miracle of 1870 will not occur again," he said; "Belgium runs a great danger of seeing her neutrality violated by one of her three neighbours."<sup>1</sup>

Hesitation was no longer permissible. Military reform was imperative.

The Government had already in 1900 tried to bring about an improvement of the Antwerp defences, but had received a check. The De Smet de Nayer Cabinet, however, succeeded in carrying the project. In 1906, 63,000,000 fr. were voted as a supplemental credit for the construction round Antwerp on both banks of the Scheldt of thirteen new forts and twelve new redoubts as an advanced line, as a complement to the existing twelve forts in the second line, and the construction of two new forts for the defence of the Lower Scheldt. Shortly afterwards the expense was further increased by 4,000,000 fr. The forts of the Meuse had been put into a complete state of defence.<sup>2</sup>

Army reform was soon added to the building of forts. On the 14th December 1909, Leopold II on his deathbed signed the new Law of Enlistment, which finally abolished the ancient system of drawing lots and established the principle of personal service, limited, however, to one soldier per family.

The reorganization was carried to its completion under King Albert. From his accession, Albert I insisted upon the necessity for Belgium to bring her military organization up to the level demanded by modern progress. He took this subject as the theme of his public speeches, and was accustomed to recall the eloquent appeals that Leopold II himself had made to the nation to awaken a sense of its patriotic duty.

Once, when addressing the Grenadiers, King Albert said:—

I ardently desire the nation to take a clear view of the future and to realize more and more the supreme and imperative duty that its very neutrality requires from it—that of continually making the necessary sacrifices in the cause of the duty that the army will have to fulfil if at any time international complications, which are always to be feared, should force Belgium to defend the inviolability of her territory.<sup>3</sup>

This Royal desire was at last realized in 1913, under the threat of the Moroccan troubles of 1911, and in consequence of the King of Rumania's warning and other equally grave revelations.

At the opening of the session of 1912 M. de Broqueville explained the international situation to Parliament. He insisted upon the possibility of a European conflict in which the Powers guaranteeing Belgian

<sup>1</sup> E. Waxweiler, op. cit. p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 131-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

neutrality would find themselves automatically involved one after another. He said: "The country must take measures to defend its territory against any belligerent who may desire to make it a base of operations or to use it for lines of communication." At the same time the Government introduced a Bill to establish the principle of universal military service.

Before the debate the Minister for War took steps to inform Parliament of the confidential information, which we have already mentioned, in the possession of the Government. This was done at a secret session, and had a decisive influence on the voting.

Thanks to these revelations, and also to a campaign for forming public opinion in the country which was put into execution, the Chamber passed the Bill in June 1913.

Certain exceptions and excuses were admitted in the raising of the forces, but it was provided that in no case should the number called to the colours fall below 49 per cent. of the annual contingent, which was increased to 33,000 a year. When this law had come into full effect, Belgium would be able to dispose of a force of 350,000 men, of whom 175,000 would form the field army, and the remainder were destined for the defence of the fortified positions of Antwerp, Liège, and Namur. In spite of this increase in numbers, the old length of service, 15, 21, or 24 months, was vigorously defended by the Government and preserved by the Bill.

The ordinary expenditure on the army was thus raised from 69,000,000 fr., the average of the first ten years of the century, to 87,500,000 for 1913, an increase of 30 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time steps were taken to perfect the fortified position of Antwerp and to complete preparations at Liège and Namur. Finally, the organization of the superior services of the army was greatly improved.

The reorganization of the Belgian army did not fail to stir the susceptibilities of the two great neighbours of the country. In 1912 the German Emperor himself showed his astonishment at the defensive measures taken by the Belgian Government, and he manifested this when he received at Aix-la-Chapelle the Belgian general who was sent to greet him in the King's name. Again, Herr Von Kiderlen-Waechter complained to Baron Beyens, who had just succeeded Baron Greindl as Belgian Minister at Berlin, of the feeling in Belgium during the Agadir crisis, and of the putting of the forts into a state of defence. "There was no reason," said the German Secretary of State, "for fear of German violation of your territory or that of your Dutch neighbours."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, on the 22nd February 1913 the Belgian Minister at Paris had an interview with M. de Margerie, Deputy Director-General of Political Affairs, on the topic of the proposed reforms.<sup>3</sup> M. de Margerie inquired about the voting on the Military Service Bill, and as to its importance, its scope, its object, and its chances of success in Parliament, and he ended his discreet inquiries by the question: "But are

<sup>1</sup> E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Baron Beyens, *L'Allemagne avant la guerre. Les causes et les responsabilités*, Paris and Brussels, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 1.

not your new armaments actuated by the fear that your neutrality might be violated by France?"

The true mission of the army and the object of the reforms had been clearly stated by M. de Broqueville at the sitting of the Chamber on the 30th November 1911:—

Our forts and our army are the expression of our fixed determination to remain a free and independent people; they are, as it were, the affirmation of our national pride and the pledge not only that Belgium will share in maintaining the integrity of her territory, but also of our national independence and security. We cannot lend ourselves to any equivocal combination. We Belgians will remain such, and by that we mean that we will remain loyal, honest, and patriotic.<sup>1</sup>

The present war has shown how truly the Minister spoke.

<sup>1</sup> E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* p. 135.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MOBILIZATION OF THE ARMY

WHEN the danger of war forced the Belgian Government on the 29th July 1914 to put the army on a strengthened peace footing, the military reforms had not yet produced their full effect. The total of 350,000 men could not be reached till 1918. Six classes were to constitute the normal effectives. The danger therefore presented itself as we were passing through a period of transition. But in its foresight the Government had so settled the plan of reorganization that even during the period of transition the army could be easily and safely mobilized and assembled.

The field army was on the 15th December 1913 put upon the peace footing that was henceforth to be the rule under the reforms that had been adopted. The effectives for the war footing naturally remained incomplete until the new law had borne full fruit. The material also was far from being suitable for the new plan. As to the armament, there was a complete absence of heavy artillery. Moreover, all the expected deliveries from Germany had not yet been made. At the moment when the German ultimatum was delivered, Krupps, assisted by a few Belgian firms, had not yet fulfilled the following orders:—

30,000 7·5 shells.	4 28-cm. guns (disappearing).
18,000 fuses with detonators.	4 28-cm. guns (fixed).
70,000 fuses (time and percussion).	

The despatch of other material was awaited from Werner, Siemens and Halske, Siemens and Schücker, Ehrardt, and other German houses.

Taken by surprise, Belgium was also short of rifles. After the war began she was forced to ask France for 10,000 Lebel rifles with 1,000 rounds per rifle in order to arm the soldiers defending Antwerp.<sup>2</sup>

It was, however, possible to mobilize in a few days 110,000 men with seven classes of persons bound to military service.

The first step taken by the Government—putting the army on a strengthened peace footing—was dictated by the fact that on the ordinary peace footing the Belgian army had only one class under arms. The calling up of three classes would result in the army divisions and the cavalry division being brought up to a strength analogous to that of the corps kept permanently embodied on the frontier by the neighbouring Powers.

We have already mentioned the fact that at 7 p.m. on the 31st July the Government ordered a general mobilization.

<sup>1</sup> See *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 1-20; *L'action de l'armée belge*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* pp. 155-6.

At this moment, when Belgium was still unaware from which side would come the attack that was feared, the plan of defence which had been drawn up during peace was provisionally applied. This plan contemplated concentration at positions which in themselves would prove that honest and loyal Belgium knew how to defend herself from any attack, no matter whence it came.

The Belgian army consisted of six divisions and one cavalry division. These forces had their headquarters and local garrisons as follows:—

First Division, Ghent (garrisons at Ghent, Bruges, Ostend, and Ypres).

Second Division, Antwerp (garrison at Antwerp).

Third Division, Liège (garrisons at Liège, Hasselt, and Verviers).

Fourth Division, Namur (garrisons at Namur and Charleroi).

Fifth Division, Mons (garrisons at Mons, Tournai, and Ath).

Sixth Division, Brussels (garrison at Brussels).

The Cavalry Division had its headquarters at Brussels.

Thus in every direction in which an attack could be foreseen on the various hypotheses regarding a war a division had been placed, which was to play the part of advance guard and receive the first shock. The 1st Division (Flanders Division) faced England; the 3rd (Liège Division), faced Germany; and the 4th and 5th faced France. There were two divisions on that boundary, as an attack might be made on Namur—in which case the defence fell on the 4th Division—or might debouch from Maubeuge—Lille, in which hypothesis the 5th Division would receive the shock.

Under the protection of the resistance thus offered by one division at the point menaced, the other five divisions could be mobilized and transported to the scene of the attack.

General mobilization involved the recall to the colours of fifteen classes: the last seven intended for garrisoning the fortresses, and the first eight, consisting of the younger men, allotted to the field army.

At the moment of meeting the enemy, each of the six divisions of the Belgian field army formed a complete unit, made up as follows:—

Three or four mixed brigades;<sup>1</sup>

One regiment of divisional cavalry;

One regiment of divisional artillery;

One battalion of engineers;

One section field telegraphs;

One corps of divisional transport.

The cavalry division contained two brigades, one cyclist battalion, three batteries of horse artillery, one company of cyclist pioneers, one pontoon train, and one corps of divisional transport.

The field army, which was about to defend the country and devote itself to the service of Right, numbered in all 117,000 men,<sup>2</sup> of whom the combatant portion numbered 93,000 rifles, 6,000 sabres, 324 guns, and 102 machine guns.<sup>3</sup>

During the concentration the German Minister at Brussels presented the ultimatum in the circumstances before stated. This had at the moment no effect on the dispositions taken by the Belgian military authorities. The army continued to face the three directions whence an attack might be expected.

<sup>1</sup> By a "mixed brigade" is meant a relatively numerous force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, united for some special object. The Belgian "mixed brigade" was made up of two regiments of three battalions each, a group of three batteries, one machine-gun company, and one platoon of military police.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, at p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, at p. 19

Like the provisional refusal of the Belgian Government to appeal to the guaranteeing Powers, the position of the Belgian forces showed that Belgium intended to maintain a correct attitude up to the last moment.

However, during the night of the 3rd August events took a turn which forced the command to take other measures. Germany declared war on France in the evening, and information about the military preparations in Rhenish Prussia showed clearly that Germany was preparing to cross the Belgian frontier.

Orders were at once issued for the destruction of all the important works, tunnels, bridges, etc., on the routes open to the invader; the railways of the Provinces of Liège and (Belgian) Luxemburg were cut, and the principal roads were blocked.

Finally, the army was faced eastwards. In accordance with the scheme of defence, the 3rd Division was to resist the enemy, supported by the fortified position of Liège, and under its protection the other divisions were to be transferred to face the foe. Thus, the 1st Division was sent from Ghent to Tirlemont, the 2nd from Antwerp to Louvain, the 5th from Mons to Perwez, and the 6th from Brussels to Wavre. The 4th Division—the Division of Namur—was entrusted with the duty of defending that place.

These movements were begun on the 4th August, and were covered by the cavalry division, which, having at first been concentrated at Gembloux, moved on Waremmes; by a mixed brigade, detached from the 3rd Division, moving on Tongres, and by another mixed brigade, detached from the 4th Division, which was sent to Huy. Under the protection of these covering troops the transfer of the forces was carried out in a rapid and orderly manner, partly by road and partly by railway.

We ourselves witnessed the arrival of the men of the 2nd Division at Louvain during the day of the 5th August. We were a small post of civic guards on duty at the powder magazine. With the first streaks of light we heard the rhythmic tramp of feet on the Malines road; soon singing became audible, and came nearer: we could recognize the melody and the words of "The Lion of Flanders." Then, in the grey morning light, the head of the column entered the sunken road which enters the city under the slopes of Mont César. The soldiers passed with a joyful and proud air, in spite of the fatigue of the march, covered with dust and dripping with perspiration, but in perfect order, without stragglers. Soon the street was lined with spectators, mostly peasants and workmen's wives. The general enthusiasm was shown by the cheering, the echoes of which were heard becoming fainter as the troops penetrated farther into the city. Never before had Louvain worn such an air of rejoicing, with all the houses gay with flags and the streets full of enthusiastic townfolk preparing a warm welcome for the soldiers. From everywhere they were brought dainties, cigars, tobacco, and beer; they were overwhelmed with attentions and flattery. Never before had there been seen such touching unanimity. Factory girls left their work to bring the soldiers their simple lunches, university professors kept open house and handed round armfuls of bottled beer. The torrent of hospitality was such that the commandant of the city was forced to take repressive measures in the interests of the health of the men.

These scenes were multiplied everywhere the army passed, and no one who witnessed them will ever forget those proud days of enthusiasm when the heart of the whole nation was filled with the same feeling.

The mobilization itself was so rapid and so perfect that the German military attaché congratulated the departmental head at the Ministry of War.<sup>1</sup> The transfer of the divisions and their concentration to face the enemy was also effected with remarkable speed and order. The various movements were completed during the 5th August.

On the same day, the orders given to the frontier guards to open fire on any foreign forces entering Belgium were reported, and the military governors of the Provinces were informed that they were no longer to regard any movement of French troops as a breach of neutrality.

The French troops on their part had, since the 3rd August, been under orders to avoid any incident on the Franco-Belgian frontier. They had to keep a distance of two to three kilometres away from it. On the 4th August an order of the Minister for War had emphasized these instructions, saying:—

Germany will endeavour by means of false news to tempt us to violate Belgian neutrality. It is strictly and formally forbidden, until orders are issued to the contrary, that there shall be any entry upon Belgian territory, even by patrols or single men, and aviators are forbidden to fly over that territory.

It was not until the 5th August, in consequence of a request by the Belgian Government, that these reconnaissances were permitted.<sup>2</sup>

On the same day the King, in accordance with the Constitution, assumed supreme command of the army, and established his General Headquarters at Louvain.

At the moment when he placed himself at the head of his soldiers, Albert I issued the following proclamation to them:—

#### SOLDIERS,

Without the slightest provocation from us, a neighbour, exulting in his might, has torn up treaties which he has signed and violated the land of our fathers.

We have been worthy of ourselves and refused to forfeit our honour; therefore he attacks us. The whole world marvels at our loyal attitude. May its respect and esteem sustain you in these supreme moments!

At the sight of the menace to her independence, the nation has been deeply moved, and her children have rushed to the frontier. Valiant soldiers of a sacred cause, I have confidence in your firm courage. I greet you in the name of Belgium. Your fellow-countrymen are proud of you. You will triumph, for you are Might in the service of Right.

Cæsar said of your ancestors: "The Belgians are the bravest of all the peoples of Gaul."

Glory awaits you, army of the Belgian people! Remember as you face the foe that you are fighting for liberty and for your threatened homes. You Flemish, think of the Battle of the Spurs, and you Walloons of Liège, who are at this moment at the post of honour, think of the 600 of Franchimont.

Soldiers,

I am leaving Brussels to place myself at your head.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. Waxweiler, op. cit. p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Official French communiqué, dated 24th March 1915. This is published in the *Cahiers documentaires* (2nd Ser., pt. xix. pp. 15-16). See also the Second Belgian Grey Book, Nos. 119-26, and *Réponse au Livre Blanc allemand* [3rd Belgian Grey Book], pp. 434-43.

<sup>3</sup> We have taken the text of this proclamation from the official publication, *La neutralité de la Belgique*, pp. 36-7.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE INVASION—THE ATTACK ON LIÈGE

Four ways were open to the German armies that were about to fall on Belgium. First, the road which leads across Luxemburg to the south of the Ardennes and thence by the central valley of the Meuse. As the object of the General Staff was to strike swiftly and vigorously, the hills and dales, steep roads and woods which cover this district were unfavourable for a rapid advance on an extended front. Secondly, the road leading from the German Camp of Elsenborn, by Malmédy and Stavelot, across the valley of the Ourthe and the heights in the direction of Huy, Namur, and Dinant. By that route they could gain the railways leading to France. Next, the great road from Aix-la-Chapelle to Liège by way of Verviers and the valley of the Vesdre. Lastly, there was the direct road from Aix-la-Chapelle to Visé, through a district most suitable for the advance of invading columns.<sup>1</sup>

It was by the last two roads in particular, on an extended front forming an opening from Visé to the plateau of the Ardennes, that the principal and immediate offensive was developed. The speedy capture of Liège was a matter of prime importance, because it opened up for the invaders a network of railways leading on the north-west and west to the plains of Limburg and Brabant and on the south-west to France. Moreover, even with the great lines in their hands at Huy and Namur, the Germans would be always under the risk of having their communications cut so long as the forts of Liège covered with their fire the railway of Aix-la-Chapelle and barred the way to the centre of Belgium.

On the morning of the 4th August, two German cavalry divisions (2nd and 4th), comprising about twelve regiments, crossed the frontier and invaded the district of Herve, which lends itself extremely well to a rapid advance. They proceeded north, avoiding Liège, and pushed on to the Meuse in the direction of Visé.<sup>2</sup> Behind this mass of cavalry troops of all arms belonging to the 9th, 8th, 7th, 10th, and 11th German Army Corps entered Belgium by the road from Aix-la-Chapelle to Liège, by the main road from Gemmenich to Visé, by the valley of the Vesdre, and by the Malmédy road.<sup>3</sup> The distance of about 30 kilometres that separates the frontier from the Meuse and the Ourthe was soon covered, and by the afternoon the enemy heads of columns

<sup>1</sup> See J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. i. p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, at p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> More accurately on the roads from Aix to Visé, from Aix to Liège by way of Herve, from the Camp of Elsenborn to La Baraque Michel, from Malmédy to Hockay, and from Malmédy to Francorchamps and Stavelot. Cf. G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, 4 p. 15, Paris, 1915.

had reached the position Bombaye-Herve-Pépinster-Remouchamps. Farther in the rear concentrations of the 3rd and 4th German Army Corps at Saint-Vith and in the north were notified. Seven army corps, about 300,000 men, were thus placed on the route of invasion which was barred by Liège.<sup>1</sup>

General Von Emmich was entrusted with the task of capturing this position. An experienced veteran, he had taken part in the 1870 War, and before the war had commanded the 10th Army Corps of Hanover. The troops that he led to the assault of Liège seem to have included the 10th Army Corps (Hanover), the 7th (Westphalia), the 9th (Schleswig-Holstein), and a brigade of the 8th or the 11th Army Corps, in all about 130,000 men.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately they entered Belgian territory some of the enemy units gave themselves up to excesses. This can readily be understood if one looks at the reports of eye-witnesses as to what happened when the Germans arrived at the frontier. At that point the officers addressed their men, saying: "Let nothing stop you! Belgium has dared to declare war on us. The more terrible you are, the quicker you will cross, and the speedier the victory! Spare only the railway stations. They will be of more use to us than cathedrals."<sup>3</sup> The troops who invaded the country by Malmédy had hardly crossed the frontier before they rushed at the first house they met, which was occupied by M. Darchambeau, one of the most respected of men. He was dragged out and killed.<sup>4</sup> About four o'clock in the afternoon of the 4th August a motor-car containing German officers entered the town of Herve. They shouted to two civilians who were about to go into their houses, and, without giving them time to reply, shot them both.<sup>5</sup>

The forces of Von Emmich had, however, in their possession reassuring proclamations, which they read and distributed to the population in the frontier villages. The first to hear them were probably Thill and Henrion, gendarmes, who were on duty quite close to the boundary line at Gemmenich. At 8.45 a.m. on the 4th August they saw a detachment of twenty-four hussars coming towards them.

"Halt!" called out the gendarmes. "Belgian frontier!"

The Germans halted and dismounted. An officer advanced, saying, "I know that," and read the following proclamation:—

#### TO THE BELGIAN PEOPLE.

It is with the greatest regret that the German troops find themselves forced to cross the frontier of Belgium. They are impelled by inevitable necessity, the neutrality

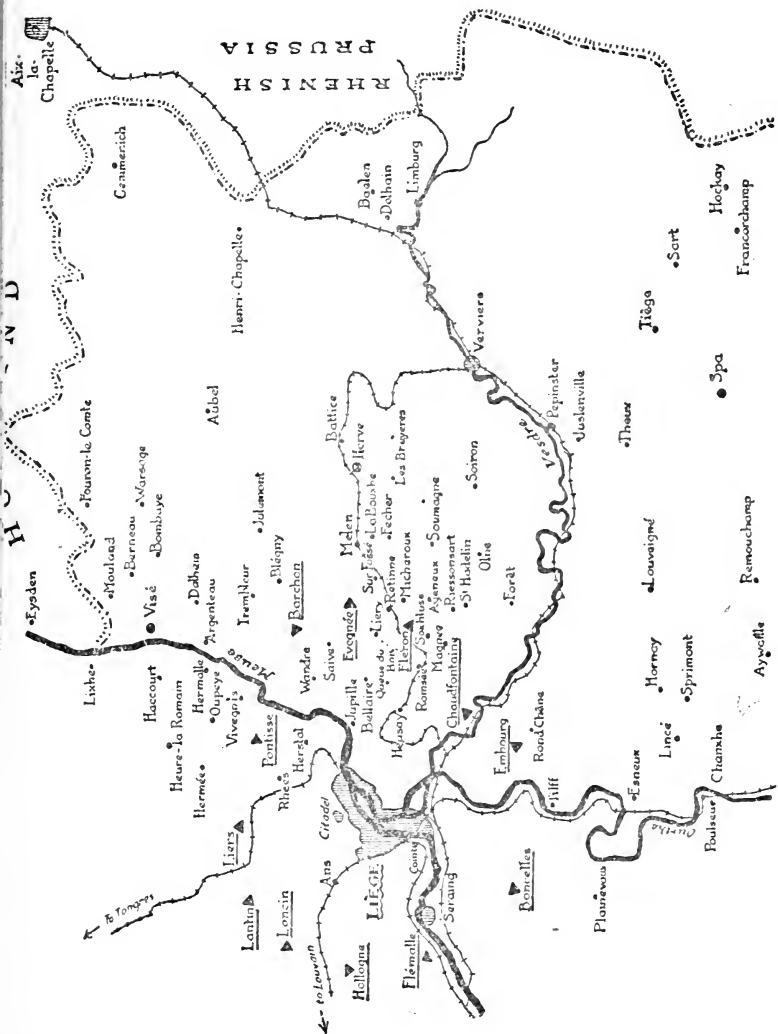
<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, at pp. 23-4.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Buchan, *op. cit.*, at pp. 48-9. Mr. Buchan makes a considerable error in taking the army of Von Emmich at 35,000 at most. On the forces under Von Emmich see Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège" in the *English Review* for April 1915, at pp. 50-65; and *L'Action de l'armée belge* at p. 11 (Official Report).

<sup>3</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, at p. 11. "I give these words verbatim from the statement of a German soldier, whom I am in a position to identify and who was a patient at a hospital at Liège." There is another statement of the same kind in the 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>4</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, at pp. 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> See the 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (Lord Bryce), at p. 10; Evidence and Documents laid before the Committee, deposition a2; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 64. According to the last-named, it was a sixteen-year-old boy who was the victim of the German officers.



MAP OF THE FIGHTING ROUND LIÈGE.

of Belgium having already been violated by French officers who in disguise crossed Belgium in a motor to enter Germany.

Belgians! It is our greatest wish that there may yet be found a way of avoiding a combat between two nations who have hitherto been friendly and at one time even allies. Remember the glorious day of Waterloo, when the German armies helped to found and establish the independence and prosperity of your country.

But we must have a free road. The destruction of bridges, tunnels, and railways will be regarded as hostile acts. Belgians! It is for you to choose.

I therefore trust that the Army of the Meuse will not be compelled to fight you. All we wish is to have a free road to attack the enemy who wanted to attack us.

I give a formal guarantee to the Belgian people that they will not suffer from the horrors of war; that we will pay in money for the provisions that must be taken in the country; that our soldiers will show themselves good friends of a people for whom we feel the utmost esteem and the greatest sympathy.

It depends upon your discretion and wisely conceived patriotism to save your country from the horrors of war.

VON EMMICH,  
General Commanding in Chief the Army of the Meuse.<sup>1</sup>

This proclamation obviously was prepared and printed at a time when Germany still expected to see Belgium yield to the ultimatum: it was distributed as it was, there being no time either to withdraw it or to alter its contents.

While the two gendarmes were listening, a third, named Béchet, had seen everything from a position near by. He cycled at full speed to the nearest telephone box. The proclamation had not been read through before the Government was informed of the incident.

The gendarmes, in accordance with their orders, retired towards Visé. About 11 a.m. the same German cavalry appeared at Warsage. They began to distribute their proclamations. After a short colloquy with M. Fléchet, the burgomaster, the detachment continued its march in the direction of Visé. About an hour after its departure there arrived about a hundred German cyclists, followed by about fifty motor-cars occupied and driven by officers and men. All had their weapons ready to fire at the first alarm. Even the chauffeurs drove with one hand, holding a revolver in the other.<sup>2</sup>

From midday until 5 p.m. squadrons of uhlans passed without interruption. All these troops were going towards Visé.

While the invasion was proceeding along the road from Aix-la-Chapelle to Visé, other columns had debouched from Herbestal. The shots which greeted their advance guard showed them that the Belgians were on the alert. No serious resistance was offered, however. The cavalry, passing by way of Limburg, fell on some Belgian outposts, who retired on Verviers after blowing up some works and part of the railway. Soon German infantry made an appearance at Verviers itself. This is how a Belgian living in a villa on the outskirts of the town describes the arrival of the enemy:—

4th August.—About one o'clock we see people on the cross-road running towards the main road, shouting "Here come the Germans!" I looked out of my window and

<sup>1</sup> See 6<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique)*, pp. 77-8).

<sup>2</sup> See the accounts of M. Fléchet and another witness made to the members of the Belgian Commission of Inquiry (16<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission*).

saw five or six horsemen with spiked helmets. They were officers looking at the town through field-glasses.

I went across the fields to the main road, where I found the main body, from 10,000 to 12,000 men, resting. I asked them where they were going. "Nach Paris" (to Paris), they told me. I remarked that they had taken the wrong road and would leave their skins on it. They replied that they had brought their coffins with them, showing me their haversacks. Most of them came from near Berlin. They were all finely-built young men. Both men and horses were wearing fine new equipment, field grey uniform, and were laden like mules (32 kilo of equipment), no distinction being made for officers. It was a veritable parade-ground column!

First incident: I was in the field by the side of the road. By me was the crowd on a cross-road which runs into the road on which the soldiers were. At one time the crowd got among the soldiers and the latter pushed them back. Suddenly I heard three shots fired at the people. They ran away, but one woman, Mme Gilissen, forty years old, fell by the side of the road. They crowded round her, but she was dead, killed on the spot. M. Bettonville, burgomaster of Petit Réchain, wearing his tricolor sash and accompanied by the rural policeman, went and found the officer, who replied, "It was a mistake. They must have fired with blank cartridge." Everybody was indignant.

Now they are passing through Verviers. I go to the Petit Jean Nursery Garden, whence one can look down on the town. Over the hedge we see the artillerymen, who have come to put in position a dozen guns trained on the town. They remain for an hour, and when the army renews its march, they go away with their arms and baggage in the direction of Fléron (the forts), by way of Grand Réchain, Xhendelesse, Ayeneux.

First cannon shot. The army was going through the village of Ayeneux about 5 p.m. when a shell, the first fired from the fort of Fléron, several kilometres away, fell in the middle of the road right among the infantry, killing seventeen and wounding forty-five. A frightful panic; the parade is put a stop to; they scatter and creep into shelter behind the folds of the ground.

Whilst the German troops were advancing on Liège by various roads, the first operation took place at Visé. It was in that direction that the two German cavalry divisions, which we have already mentioned, had proceeded at full speed. They were to seize the town, which commanded the passage of the Meuse at that spot. Unless Visé were in the hands of the Germans, it would be impossible to invest Liège completely or to cover the country on the further side of the Meuse with a flood of cavalry destined to mask the intentions and movements of the invading troops.

The cavalry who were arriving before Visé were supported by guns and infantry brought up in motor-cars, the same that the people of Warsage had seen go by at midday.<sup>1</sup>

The enemy found that the bridge which joins Visé with the suburb on the left bank was destroyed. The Belgians had blown it up the day before. The bridge of Argenteau and the tunnels of Trois Ponts and Nas-Proué had also been destroyed.<sup>2</sup> The 2nd battalion of the 12th Line Regiment under Major Collyns were posted on the left bank ready to dispute the crossing of the river. The Belgians opened a sustained fire on the Germans debouching from Visé. The enemy attempted to force a passage by building a bridge of boats. While the German pontoon train was engaged in this task, the Belgians from their trenches on the left bank opened fire on them with precision. The fort of Pontisse came into action at one o'clock and shelled the troops attempt-

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, at p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Account by an inhabitant of Warsage (16<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*).

ing to effect a crossing of the river. A large number of German officers were soon put out of action.<sup>1</sup>

The people of Warsage soon saw the German motor-cars on the way back, this time to Aix-la-Chapelle. They were full of wounded.<sup>2</sup>

While the soldiers of the 12th were valiantly making head against the repeated assaults of an enemy superior in numbers, and were successively bringing to nothing every attempt to cross the river, the Germans were avenging their check on the inhabitants of Visé. They compelled the burgomaster to requisition townsmen to remove the barricades which had been erected on the roads. The soldiers soon began to fire at random, and some men of the 25th Infantry Regiment began to plunder houses. Murders followed. Scarcely ten minutes after their arrival the soldiers fired at M. Istars, the cashier at the station, who was going home to dinner. A man from a village near by was killed on the boulevard by a blow which took off his head. Another man was slaughtered on the road; others were shot near the bridge. In the evening the people were ejected from their houses and taken to the market square and the Rue de la Fontaine. At least four were killed during this operation.<sup>3</sup>

However, bad news arrived, which alarmed and at the same time enraged the valiant defenders of the left bank. The Germans, extending their movement northward along the right bank of the Meuse, had succeeded in throwing two hussar regiments across the river by the fords of Lixhe. The Belgians' left was turned and they were threatened with being cut off from Liège.<sup>4</sup> The order to retire was given, but the soldiers refused to obey and continued to fire like madmen. Major Collyns was forced to explain to them the danger of the position they were in. At last the men listened to reason. The heroic little group retired in good order on the line of the forts, singing "The Lion of Flanders."<sup>5</sup>

This was the first engagement of the campaign. The men had shown a self-possession and courage that bade well for the future.

Next day, the 5th August, the enemy threw a bridge across at Lixhe, and in the course of the afternoon advance guards of the German cavalry made their appearance at Tongres. They proceeded to push out reconnaissances and to hide by a dense screen all the movements of the invading forces to the north of Liège.

At Liège itself, meanwhile, General Leman was preparing to meet the principal attack. Since the 2nd August the garrison had been set

<sup>1</sup> On the combat of Visé see Major Collyns, "La défense de Visé," in *Récits de combattants*, by C. Buffin, pp. 3-11, Paris, 1916; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, at p. 23; *Courrier de l'Armée* of 17th November 1914, article "Le Colonel Jacques"; J. Buchan, op. cit. at p. 152; E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, pp. 24-6; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, at p. 208. The account of A. Neville Hilditch in *The Stand of Liège*, at pp. 8-9 (Oxford, 1914; Oxford Pamphlets, 1914-15), is absolutely fantastic and full of serious mistakes. What he says as to the participation of civilians is contrary to the truth.

<sup>2</sup> Account by an inhabitant of Warsage (16<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*).

<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, at p. 208; Evidence and Documents laid before the Committee on alleged German Outrages (Lord Bryce), deposition a16.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, at p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Courrier de l'Armée* of 17th November 1914.

to cut down the numerous trees round the forts, so as to level the area commanded by the guns and remove all obstacles that might obstruct the lines of fire.

Hundreds of miners and navvies were requisitioned to dig trenches for the infantry who were to defend the intervals between the forts.<sup>1</sup> On the 3rd August General Leman ordered the destruction of the village of Boncelles, situated about 600 yards from the fort of the same name, because it obstructed the line of fire. Next day at 1.30 p.m. 4,133 houses were in flames.<sup>2</sup> The villagers had a quarter of an hour to leave their homes. The order caused a panic. The poor people hastily gathered a few articles and left the condemned village, wheeling the old folk and children in wheelbarrows. They let the cattle loose and drove them away, but many beasts perished in the flames. The systematic destruction continued on the 4th and 5th August. The walls which fire had not destroyed were mined and blown up by the pioneers and the workmen of Coqueril.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time precautions were taken for the siege that Liège expected to undergo. In order to have a stock to feed both the civilian population and the defending army, hundreds of cattle and pigs were taken from the neighbouring villages and put inside the lines of defence.<sup>4</sup> The plaintive bellowing of the cattle announced to the population that the ardent city was once more to know a time of strife.<sup>5</sup>

During the morning of the 5th August the miners engaged in destroying the last remnants of the village of Boncelles suddenly heard firing in the Forest of Beauregard and the furious galloping of horses. Soon there appeared a few lancers, the survivors of a squadron of the 2nd Regiment who had come into contact with a regiment of German cavalry at Plainevaux. In spite of their inferiority in numbers the Belgians attacked the enemy and charged them vigorously. In this unequal contest they lost three-quarters of their number.<sup>6</sup>

These skirmishes heralded the imminence of the main action, the attack on the forts and their intervals.

The defence of Liège rested on six principal forts and six secondary forts, or *fortins*. On the north, nearest to the Dutch frontier, was the fort of Pontisse, on a slope running down to the right bank of the Meuse. From there to the Dutch village of Eysden there is a distance of some 14 kilometres, of which a gap of 9 kilometres was not defended. It was through that gap that the column sent to attack the Belgian positions at Visé intended to pass. To the south-east of Pontisse, on the other bank of the Meuse, was the fort of Barchon, and to the south of Barchon the *fortin* of Evegnée. South of Evegnée the fort of Fléron commanded the railway to Aix-la-Chapelle. On either bank of the Vesdre there were respectively the *fortins* of Chaudfontaine and

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> According to the calculations of M. Henri Masson, advocate at the Court of Appeal, Brussels, published in *The Tablet*, of London, the damage caused to Liège by the siege amounts to £6,916,000.

<sup>3</sup> See "The Diary of a Soldier of the Fort of Boncelles" (*The Times*, 6th October 1914).

<sup>4</sup> P. Hamelius, *The Siege of Liège*, p. 43, London, 1914.

<sup>5</sup> "Diary of a Soldier of the Fort of Boncelles" (*The Times*, 6th October 1914).

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, at p. 24.

Embourg, commanding the principal railway to Germany via Verviers. Crossing the valley of the Ourthe, westwards, one reached the fort of Boncelles, commanding the hills between the Ourthe and the Meuse. North of Boncelles, on the plateau beyond the Meuse, three important defence works had been built—the fort of Flémalle, the *fortin* of Hollogne, and the great fort of Loncin. The last named commanded the railway junction at Ans and the railway running from Liège, on the other side of the plateau, in a northerly and westerly direction towards Limburg and Brabant. Lastly, between Loncin and Pontisse the circle was closed by the *fortins* of Lantin and Liers.

The large forts each possessed five large cupolas and three or four small ones, and were armed with two 15-cm. guns, four 12-cm., two 21-cm. howitzers, and three or four 5·7-cm. guns. Ten 5·7-cm. guns were also placed on the parapet. The small forts possessed four large cupolas and three or four small ones. They were armed with two 15-cm. guns, two 12-cm. guns, one 21-cm. howitzer, and three or four 5·7 guns not protected by cupolas. The parapets were furnished with seven or eight 5·7 guns.<sup>1</sup>

In theory these forts formed a double line of defence, in the sense that if one of them fell into the enemy's hands, its two neighbours on the right and the left could keep it under the fire of their guns and prevent any advance through the breach thus made.<sup>2</sup>

The 3rd Division, which was to defend the gaps between the forts and resist the enemy, with the fortress for its base, counted 18,500 rifles, 500 sabres, 60 guns, and 24 machine guns.<sup>3</sup> During the attack on Liège the 15th mixed brigade—detached from the 4th Division (Namur)—was recalled from Huy to join the defenders. Lastly, the garrisons of the forts numbered about 4,500 men, or an artillery battery with 250 men and three companies of 40 men each; total, 370 men per fort.<sup>4</sup> General Leman could therefore only oppose some 30,000 men<sup>5</sup> to the 130,000 of Von Emmich. This numerical inferiority of one to four made the task of the Governor of Liège exceedingly arduous, but great things were to be expected from a man of his strong personality. An engineer officer and commandant of the Military School, he had worked under Brialmont on the defences of Antwerp and of the Meuse, and was regarded as the best disciple of the great military engineer. He was approaching sixty years of age. A grave, silent man, he exacted respect for discipline and obedience.

It was impossible for him, with the mobile forces at his disposal, to defend at the same time the whole 52 kilometres which formed the perimeter of the defence. He had to economize his forces and mass them where a direct attack was foreseen, keeping a sufficient reserve to be ready for an attack made on several sectors at once. The mobile forces would therefore have to be continually shifted by forced marches from one sector to another, and divide their time between marching and countermarching and fighting in the trenches dug between the

<sup>1</sup> These details from Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège," in the *English Review* of April 1915.

<sup>2</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> From Ch. Bronne's "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; J. Buchan, *op. cit.* p. 98.



forts. Wherever small detachments might succeed in getting through the gaps they must at once be either opposed or have their retreat cut off. This strategy, which was imposed by the limited resources available, demanded from the commander complete ability to foresee everything and continuous attention.

Von Emmich's plan appears to have been to attack the forts of Liège on three sides at once—on the north-east, the east, and the south. The troops of the 9th Army Corps were detached in order to seize Visé, cross the Meuse, and fall upon the north-east-north sector of the defence; the 7th Army Corps marched against the Vesdre-Meuse sector; and the 10th Army Corps came from Verviers through the district between the Vesdre and the Ourthe.<sup>1</sup>

The execution of this plan was, however, delayed by the resistance which the Germans of the 9th Army Corps encountered at the Visé crossing, and the march of the 10th Army Corps, over ground dotted with hills and covered with woods, was not so rapid as was expected.<sup>2</sup>

During the morning of the 5th August a flag of truce was sent to General Leman, and summoned him to allow the German army to pass, assuring him that Germany had no quarrel with Belgium. The Governor of Liège gave a point-blank refusal.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately swarms of Germans advanced on all sides to attack the Meuse-Vesdre sector. This attack was covered by the fire of a great number of heavy guns, 15-cm. howitzers and 21-cm. mortars, which rained shells on the forts of Pontisse, Barchon, Evegnée, and Fléron.<sup>4</sup> In the afternoon the attack developed as far as the fort of Chaudfontaine.<sup>5</sup> Numerous German aeroplanes swept through the air, directing the fire of the batteries.<sup>6</sup> The great 15-cm. guns and 21-cm. howitzers of the forts replied effectively to the enemy fire. According to rumours, which it is impossible to check, the guns of Evegnée during this duel destroyed two German guns.<sup>7</sup> Adopting from the beginning the odious tactics of terrorizing civilians, some of the German batteries attempted to avoid the murderous reply of the forts by surrounding themselves with a ring of the inhabitants, including some women and children. This was done in particular by a German battery firing at the Convent of the Pères Carmes at Chèvremont. It protected itself against the Belgian fire by surrounding itself with people living near by.<sup>8</sup> This was also done at Forêt. When the Germans arrived at the heights of the village, they put their guns into position and made about a dozen civilians, including M. Chabot, the parish priest, stand near the guns under the fire of the forts.<sup>9</sup>

After the bombardment had prepared the attack, the enemy infantry appeared. The Belgians were amazed to see the enemy advancing in close formation, marching as if on parade, with hardly any space

<sup>1</sup> See Sketch No. 3 in *La campagne de l'armée belge* and E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, at pp. 23-4.

<sup>2</sup> E. Dane, *op. cit.* p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. Broune, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>6</sup> "L'invasion allemande au pays de Verviers," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 27th July 1915.

<sup>7</sup> A. Neville Hilditch, *The Stand of Liège*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> 10<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique)*, p. 119).

<sup>9</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport*.

between the men. In the Fléron-Chaufontaine gap the enemy drove in front of him, as a shield, a column of the inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

The guns of the forts, the artillery posted in the gaps, the machine guns, and the rifles all vomited a hellish fire on the moving mass. Entire ranks were mowed down, but fresh ones kept moving up. The troops defending the gaps withheld their fire until the assailants reached the barbed-wire entanglements and a check occurred in the first rank. Then, taking calm aim, the Belgians delivered murderous volleys.<sup>2</sup> Some spectators who were tending the garrison's cattle on the plain of Bressoux saw the grey columns advance almost up to the trenches and the glacis of the forts. Their hearts grew heavy with anxiety, and they wondered whether the Belgians had not allowed the enemy to get too close, when suddenly a rattle of machine-gun fire, all firing at once, came echoing across the plain. The attacking column lay on the ground, mown down.<sup>3</sup>

The troops defending the gaps between the forts struggled with the energy of despair against the grey masses which kept coming again and again like the waves of a stormy sea. At certain points they had sullenly to yield ground before the violence of the attack, and at one moment the situation between Fort Barchon and the Meuse became critical. In spite of their terrible losses the Germans succeeded in passing the barbed wire and in reaching the parapet of the trenches. They were mowed down by machine guns, and dead and dying lay heaped together; but they continued to come on, and finally succeeded in breaking the line.<sup>4</sup>

General Leman then ordered a counter-attack by the 11th Brigade, composed chiefly of the 11th and 31st Line Regiments, under General Bertrand. The enemy saw the Belgians advancing with fixed bayonets, and the sight of the *arme blanche* caused a panic. The crack troops of the 7th Army Corps turned tail and fled in disorder more than 3 kilometres to the rear, behind the positions from which they had started. They abandoned fourteen guns. During the charge Colonel Dusart, of the 11th, was killed at the head of his regiment.<sup>5</sup>

On the rest of the Vesdre-Meuse front the attackers were everywhere repulsed with heavy losses.<sup>6</sup> There, too, striking incidents occurred. The following is probably an incident in the assault of the 5th August, and is attributed to General Bertrand. He was with his mixed brigade in the rear of Fort Evegnée, when he was informed that very large German forces had reached a point near the fort. Without waiting for details, the General rushed to an abandoned château, forced the door, and telephoned to the fort. No reply; the wires were cut. Noticing a Belgian observation balloon coming down, Bertrand found that it was still in telephonic communication with the work. The fort replied: "I can do no more, being entirely covered by Germans." Bertrand answered: "Put your men under cover and observe my

<sup>1</sup> 10<sup>e</sup> Rapport.

<sup>2</sup> E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> T. Hamelius, *The Siege of Liège*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 24; E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 24-5; E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, pp. 30-1; A. Neville Hilditch, *The Stand of Liège*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 25.

fire." He at once gave the order to some of his brigade artillery to open fire on Evegnée Fort.

At the fourth shot he was informed that the range was correct. The artillery then opened a storm of fire. After six or seven volleys the fort telephoned, "Cease fire. There is not a single live German at the fort."

Soon a new communication, which this time came from the fort, advised Bertrand that a very strong enemy column was advancing on Evegnée by the Faotet ravine under the shelter of the guns. As Bertrand knew the lie of the country, he himself directed the fire of his artillery. A few volleys, and then the fort signalled that the enemy column was annihilated.

Shortly afterwards another column advanced towards No. 1 salient of the same fort. Bertrand repeated his tactics with the same success.<sup>1</sup>

Repulsed on all sides, the 7th Army Corps at last decided to retire out of range of the Belgians, leaving the ground heaped with dead and wounded men. They left 800 prisoners in the hands of the defenders of Liège. These were at once sent to Brussels as a proof that the Belgian soldiers had gained their first success.<sup>2</sup>

The Germans, repulsed from the forts, took a cruel revenge for their reverse on the people of the neighbouring villages. At Blégny (Trembleur) soldiers of the 15th, 19th, and 23rd Infantry Regiments, enraged at the resistance of Fort Barchon, killed Joseph Smets, the gunsmith, drove the people out of their homes, and about 9 p.m. set the village on fire. Next day a workman was murdered. The men, about 300 in number, were shut up in the church.<sup>3</sup>

Driven by the Belgian troops from the La Clé road (Fléron to Herve), the Germans retreated to Soumagne. Soldiers of the 35th and 56th Regiments fired at the houses, entered them, and took prisoner all the unfortunate people who fell into their hands. About 200 prisoners were taken off towards Mélen. On the outskirts of that village an officer shot a woman and her baby with his revolver. Another group were hustled off in the direction of Fléron. Five of these men were wounded by the shells of the fort. A band of Germans rushed into the village by another way, shouting, "It is your brothers who are firing at us from Fort Fléron." They arrested some of the inhabitants and collected them in the meadow of "Fonds Leroy." They shot some, killed others by the bayonet, and finished off the wounded. Other executions took place in the Chession's meadow, in the Neuray's meadow, and near La Bouxhe. One hundred and four houses were set on fire and over 150 civilians were killed, including several women and children.<sup>4</sup> At Micheroux the soldiers set fire to a block of houses and fired at Mme Gorrès, a widow, who fell with two bullets in her head. Her grandson, five months old, was torn from the arms of the person who was carrying him and killed. The

<sup>1</sup> Account in the *Courrier de l'Armée*.

<sup>2</sup> E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 182-4; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, p. 12; Evidence and Documents laid before the Committee, depositions a7 and a20.

<sup>4</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 133 et seq.; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* and App. I; *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, pp. 11-12; Evidence and Documents, depositions a4, a5, and a9.

people, with their hands bound, were imprisoned in Fécher-Soumagne church. Five were shot, and four were burned alive in their cellars.<sup>1</sup> A regular panic caused mistakes on the part of the Germans. The troops in the village fired at one another. Thus, the 4th company of the 27th Regiment, which had lost its way, was fired upon by the German artillery.<sup>2</sup>

At La Bouxhe-Mélen the soldiers of the 155th Regiment had received a hearty welcome the evening before (4th August). They even played cards with the villagers. Next morning they departed to attack Fléron. They were violently repulsed, and returned in a rage. At 11 p.m. the inhabitants were ordered to go into their cellars. About 3.30 a.m. there was brisk firing. The soldiers rushed into the houses, drove out the people, and, as they crossed the threshold, shot them at close range. About ten men were killed in this summary manner. The women who fled along the road, where several houses were burning, were received with threats.

At La Bouxhe there were also killed forty-eight unfortunate people who had been taken from neighbouring villages to be put in front of the troops marching against the forts.<sup>3</sup>

At the village of Olne during the afternoon of the 5th the troops, who had departed in the morning after a hearty breakfast to attack the forts, were seen to be returning. They had been driven from the region of Forêt by the guns of Fléron. In front were the wounded, including a major and another officer. The men were running in disorder. On the pretence that signals had been made with the Belgian flag, which till then had been flying from the church tower, but had just been taken down by German soldiers, who tugged at it to tear it down, four men were killed, including the curate and the clerk of the commune. When the latter's body was found, he had only the lower part of his head and one ear remaining.<sup>4</sup>

At Fléron itself, which is situated a little below the fort of the same name, three people were killed; others fell in neighbouring communes where they had taken refuge or had been carried off. There were altogether eleven victims.<sup>5</sup>

At Argenteau, German soldiers, who had just been repulsed at Fort Barchon, said that the inhabitants had fired at them. They made the station-master, and others who were there, come out of his house. A search revealed no weapons, but the soldiers took the opportunity of plundering several houses.<sup>6</sup>

The excesses show how greatly the repulse of the troops who had

<sup>1</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 128 et seq.; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, pp. 10-11; Evidence and Documents, deposition a12.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of Pte. Kurt Hofmann, published in the Evidence and Documents of the English Committee, pp. 250-1. See the photographs, pp. 291-2.

<sup>3</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 84 et seq.; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; Evidence and Documents, depositions a2 and a4; holograph statement of a Westphalian prisoner of war, published in *Les violations des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne*, p. 74 (Publication du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, 1915). It is probable that this statement refers to Mélen and not to Mettet, near Namur.

<sup>4</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 92 et seq.; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>5</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 146 et seq.

<sup>6</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

attacked the Meuse-Vesdre sector had affected the subjects of temporary defeat. Whilst the 7th Army Corps was reforming beyond the range of the forts, General Von Emmich summoned up fresh troops.<sup>1</sup> The 9th Army Corps, which had succeeded in the course of the day in crossing the Meuse to the south of Visé and at Visé itself, had just arrived before the north-east sector of the defence, and the 10th Army Corps was approaching the south-east sector by the valley of the Vesdre.

During the night of the 5th-6th August a fresh attack was delivered, more violent than the former. It was delivered at the same time against the Meuse-Vesdre and Ourthe-Meuse sectors.<sup>2</sup>

Barchon was attacked by the German army coming from the north-east, which ascended by the road from Dalhem to Jupille, passing by way of Rabozée. The fort at once began to bombard these troops. From the opposite heights of the Meuse the guns of Pontisse joined in, but the presence of three German regiments who had surrounded that fort during the night caused a diversion.

The enemy had climbed the slope and were just reaching Rabozée, when suddenly on the right the Belgian infantry opened a sustained fire from a trench at right angles to the road. Struck by this fire and that of the fort, dead and wounded men were strewed on the way. The enemy continued to mount. The firing becoming more and more murderous, the Germans rushed in a body to a field on the left of the road, so as to enfilade the Belgian trench with their machine guns. The Belgians suddenly opened fire on the enemy at almost point-blank range from a second trench which ran along this very meadow and was well concealed. In spite of their losses, the enemy still came on. Bayonet fighting began, but the Belgians succeeded in holding their position. In the morning the road and neighbouring fields were covered with corpses. Four hundred and three Germans were buried in the field. The German wounded were taken to the château and park of Argenteau. Along the Meuse many Germans were fleeing towards Maestricht, stopping on the way at empty houses, breaking open the doors and hastily seizing the wine. The track of their flight was covered with bottles.<sup>3</sup>

It was during the night attack on Fort Barchon that the attempt was made to surprise the Headquarters of the defence and to kill Leman.<sup>4</sup> This attempt seems to have been made about 3.30 a.m. The offices of the Headquarters were situated in the Rue Ste.-Foi. Gendarmes Houba and Munnik were on guard at the Nadar barrier, which blocked the street by the Rue St.-Léonard. Commandant Marchand came out for a breath of fresh air, when suddenly those inside the offices heard him say, "You don't deceive me. In any case, you won't frighten me!" Shots rang out. Captain of Gendarmerie L'Hermite, Provost-Marshal of the 3rd Division, rushed outside with Commandants Buisset and

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> See *La campagne de l'armée belge* at p. 25; E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium* p. 31 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 195-7.

<sup>4</sup> Several different versions of this incident are in existence. We give here the account of an eye-witness. See the account given in *Récits de combattants*, by C. Buffin, pp. 19-25.

Vinçotte of the Staff, Lieutenant Renard, Yungers, commanding the gendarmerie, and Pte. Duchêne. They found themselves in front of an enemy detachment of six officers and some thirty troopers who had succeeded in getting into the city and reaching Headquarters. The Belgians fired at them, and five fell on the pavement. In the street brave Captain Marchand lay lifeless by the body of his assailant, Major Von Alvensleben, whose hand still grasped a revolver. A German lieutenant had rolled into the middle of the street, and lay motionless. The corpse of the sentry was stretched near the door. Gendarme Houba, treacherously wounded by a dagger or saw-edged bayonet, was disembowelled, and his comrade Munnik was lying near him seriously wounded.

The assailants were repulsed and part of them got away: some twenty were killed. The blow had failed. General Leman, who so fortunately escaped, no longer felt safe in this distant position and retired to the fort of Loncin.

German troops coming from the north-east also appeared before Pontisse.<sup>1</sup> From 5 to 7 p.m. about forty German shells, fired from the right bank, fell on this fort. Then all became quiet.

About 11 p.m. the people of Hermée, a village quite near the fort, were aroused from slumber. In the semi-darkness troops were seen everywhere—on the roads, in the yards, and in the gardens. Some of the people were naïve enough to think they were the English. But they soon saw the spiked helmets. Taking advantage of the twilight, the 30th, 89th, and 90th German Regiments had arrived in complete silence. They at once plundered M. Juprelle's spirit shop.

Fort Pontisse soon became aware of the enemy's presence. At 1.15 a.m. shells began to fall on all the streets of Hermée. Many Germans lying by the roadside were seized with panic and fled into the open country.

About a quarter of an hour later, 450 Belgians of the 11th Line Regiment, detached from the fort, opened a brisk fire on the enemy. But the 90th German Regiment recovered itself. It replied vigorously and advanced on Pontisse by the Herstal road. The other two regiments did not take part in this fighting, but, although protected by the farms and houses, they were hit by shells.

The 90th Regiment got to grips with the troops defending the gaps. Three Belgian officers, showing their men an example of the finest military courage, rushed at the enemy, whilst behind them their men cleared a way with their bayonets. In his impetuosity Ensign-Lieutenant Noterman found himself at one time quite alone in the German lines. It was 2 a.m. Seeing himself in danger of being taken, the lieutenant threw himself flat down and hid his flag as best he could. The enemy passed him by. Towards morning he was discovered and taken to a house where about thirty German soldiers had collected their prisoners. Suddenly the guard became obviously very alarmed. They seized their weapons and went away. They soon reappeared, carried along with the fugitives from one of their companies repulsed from Pontisse. All disappeared into the night.

Immediately the prisoners made their way to the Belgian positions, but not before Noterman had looked for and found his flag. It was

<sup>1</sup> As to the attack on Pontisse, see G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 225-7.

that of the 11th Line Regiment. As the little company approached the Belgian lines, they saw a German detachment of 140 men and three officers in a panic, running towards them and away from a pursuing company of Belgians. The fugitives, not thinking that these were unarmed Belgians, thought they were cut off and surrendered. The Belgians took their rifles and conducted them, very crestfallen, to the lines of Liège.<sup>1</sup>

The struggle at Pontisse lasted until daybreak. It ended by the retreat of the Germans, many of whom gained the Dutch frontier.

About 4 a.m. the people of Hermée, hidden in their cellars, became aware that the Germans had ceased firing. The latter had broken open the door of the church and hoisted the white flag on the tower.<sup>2</sup>

Furious at the resistance of Pontisse, the regiments which remained in the shelter of the village—the 30th and 89th—vented their exasperation on the inhabitants. Being hit in the dark by the bullets of the defenders of Pontisse, the Germans said that the inhabitants were shooting at them. Eleven men, including two old men of eighty-two and seventy-six, were shot. A number of houses were set on fire, including four fine farms with all their outbuildings. About 9.30 a.m. the Germans retired, taking their wounded with them, but leaving at Hermée an army surgeon and some assistants to attend to fifty-five of their men.<sup>3</sup> According to information obtained on the spot, the attack on Pontisse cost the enemy 1,800 killed and wounded.<sup>4</sup>

On the same night—5th–6th August—the Germans made attacks not only on the north-east, but also on the south-east, especially near Fort Boncelles, between the Meuse and the Ourthe.<sup>5</sup> The defence of this sector was very difficult. The clear ground in front of the fort consisted only of the space formerly occupied by the village of Boncelles, now destroyed. The assailants here could advance under the cover of numerous woods—that of Plainevaux, stretching as far as the Ourthe, those of Neuville and of Vecquée, that of Bégnac, which forms a continuation of the St. Lambert Wood as far as Trooz and the Meuse. Here the 10th Army Corps (Hanoverian) advanced, having reached Boncelles by way of Francorchamps, Spa, Stoumont, Aywaille, and Esneux.<sup>6</sup> Witnesses present at the fighting at this sector estimate that the whole corps, some 40,000 men, must have taken part in the attack. It is impossible to check this estimate, which seems to be obviously exaggerated.

The fort had been advised the night before of the enemy's approach. Some uhlans had appeared as scouts at Esneux. A few well-directed shells dispersed them.<sup>7</sup> They exacted vengeance from the villagers. In the night, ominous flames showed that the enemy had set fire to Esneux. Seven civilians and three Belgian soldiers, who had been taken prisoners, were shot near the Hôtel Bellevue. Many inhabitants were made prisoners and taken to Plainevaux to serve as a living shield

<sup>1</sup> *Courrier de l'Armée* of 16th January 1915.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228; Evidence and Documents, deposition a35.

<sup>4</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> "Diary of a Soldier of Fort Boncelles" (*The Times*, 6th October 1914).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

for the assailants of Boncelles.<sup>1</sup> The village of Poulseur on the Ourthe met with the same fate as Esneux. It was set on fire during the night of the 5th August. Three inhabitants were killed.<sup>2</sup>

The Germans who marched to attack Boncelles had passed the previous day and part of the night in fortifying themselves and directing their artillery on Plainevaux, to the north of Neuville, and on the heights of Ramet. The 9th Line Regiment and the Carabineers, who had fought at Barchon on the 5th, defended the trenches between the Ourthe and the Meuse, in company with the 1st Chasseurs and the 9th Line Regiment.<sup>3</sup>

About 11.30 p.m. on the 5th August the people of Liège heard a violent cannonade in the south-east. The Germans were shelling Forts Embourg and Boncelles. The enemy's fire was well directed, shell after shell landing on the parapets of the forts with an ugly whistle and exploding. The violence of the explosions was very remarkable.<sup>4</sup> The darkness and the wooded nature of the ground facilitated the infantry attack which followed. The grey masses at first advanced without firing, ready to rush forward for a quick assault. The Belgians saw them indistinctly through the darkness of the night. At Fort Boncelles Captain Lefert ordered the men to fire. The guns of the cupolas thundered and the rifles of the infantry manning the parapets crackled.<sup>5</sup> Bounding forward, the assailants rushed to attack the trenches defending the gaps. They were mown down by machine guns; a few only reached the parapet of the trenches, and were there bayoneted. The first attack was repulsed.

About three o'clock in the morning a fresh assault was delivered. Spectators, looking on from the hills beyond the bridge of Fragnée, saw the flash of rifles between Embourg and Boncelles, west of the Ourthe. This time, it seems, the assault was not preceded by artillery preparation. The troops of the 10th Army Corps crawled forward, hoping to surprise the defence. Then, having got as near as possible to the trenches, they again attacked in solid formation. The forts suddenly turned their searchlights upon them, and in the hard light they were seen, to be struck down and annihilated by the fire of the defence. They fell by hundreds, but the survivors rushed over the corpses and climbed on to the parapets of the trenches. Furious hand-to-hand bayonet fighting followed. For five hours fighting continued in this fashion, the Belgian artillery and bayonets causing a veritable carnage. The men of the 9th and 14th Line Regiments fought like demons.

Finally, the defence of the gaps gave way at some points, and the situation in the Ourthe-Meuse sector became critical.

General Leman despatched thither the available men of the 12th Brigade, called the 9th to assist, and had them followed by the troops of the 15th Brigade (4th Division), which had been hastily sent from Huy to Liège.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 36 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Kennedy, *The Campaign round Liège*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>5</sup> "Diary of a Soldier of Fort Boncelles."

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 25.



Furious counter-attacks, comparable with that of Bertrand's Brigade on the previous day, stopped the enemy's advance. The troops of the 10th Army Corps, whose artillery was already shelling the bridge of Ougrée, gave way under the shock, turned tail, and ran in disorder. Some of the fugitives of this corps fled as far as Spa, five leagues in the rear.<sup>1</sup>

Fort Boncelles had taken the greatest share in the defence of the Ourthe-Meuse sector. Its guns had been firing all night long, but the garrison could not judge the effect of their fire owing to the darkness. At 4 a.m. they saw the Germans entrenching themselves and putting machine guns in position about four hundred yards from the fort. In ten minutes they had destroyed these troops. At 5.30 a.m. they noticed a white flag flying in the open. Commandant Lefert and Lieutenant Montois went to the top of the works and ordered the "cease fire." Lefert had hardly finished speaking before he was wounded by the enemy, who had treacherously opened fire again. Shortly afterwards eighty Germans of the 74th Hanoverian Regiment surrendered and were taken to Seraing. The battle was ended in this section. Fort Boncelles had nine killed and forty wounded. The defenders of the gaps near the fort lost 1,400 killed, mostly belonging to the 1st Chasseurs and the 9th Line Regiment. The German dead were lying there in heaps, and the sight of them horrified the garrison of Boncelles. Orders were given to hire peasants from the neighbourhood at 8 fr. a day to bury all these dead.<sup>2</sup> The diary of a soldier of Boncelles says that 16,000 identity disks were taken from German corpses, but we do not know on what evidence this extraordinary statement is based.

The fury of the men of the 92nd and 74th German Regiments, who had suffered heavy losses, was turned against the inhabitants of the village of Poulseur. As we have already stated, the village had been set on fire during the night. At 6 a.m. a group of women and children, with a few old men—about fifty all told—were driven away in the direction of Comblain. A great number of men were taken to the bridge of Chanxhe and bound to the handrail, and then subjected to insults and threats. A young woman of twenty-one and two men were killed. One, Victor Legros, twenty-five years old, escaped and hid in the excavation of a quarry, where he was found on the 16th August dead from hunger.<sup>3</sup>

The tragedy of Lincé was still more horrible. The Germans, violently repulsed by Forts Embourg and Boncelles, returned in disorder and halted among the people in a threatening manner. Excesses had already been committed during the evening of the 5th. M. Nandrin and his son had been arrested because an officer, who was supping with them, was wounded in the course of a squabble. Their house was set on fire. As the flames spread the inhabitants tried to escape; they were arrested and ill-treated. A girl had her jaw shattered by a shot. M. Pirmez and his son, while getting the hay requisitioned by the Germans, were killed in the yard of their château by two wandering

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 25; see R. P. De Groote, "Le combat de Sart-Tilmant," in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 29-33.

<sup>2</sup> The details are taken from the "Diary of a Soldier of Fort Boncelles;" see also R. P. De Groote, "Le combat de Sart-Tilmant."

<sup>3</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 36 et seq.; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

troopers. It was after 7.30 a.m. that the massacre was prepared. A body of soldiers, escaping from the neighbourhood of Fort Embourg, gave the signal by arresting three civilians, including Canon Simon, director of the Maria Theresa College at Herve. In spite of the vigorous protests of the parish priest, they killed a little twelve-year-old girl and a paralytic, and dragged away a number of inhabitants to be shot. The list of the dead at Lincé includes twenty-three inhabitants, sixteen or seventeen of whom were killed at the field of execution.<sup>1</sup> The pretext for this massacre was the stereotyped accusation: "Civilians had been firing." In fact, the victims paid with their lives for the bloody repulse of the enemy at this sector of the defences of Liège.

Lastly, Chaudfontaine and Fléron were also attacked during this same night, while the assailants were terrorizing the people of the neighbourhood. The picturesque hamlet of St.-Hadelin lay under the heights of Olne. At 4.30 p.m. on the 5th August a shell from Fort Fléron killed six German soldiers there and wounded ten more. The soldiers became unruly. They were excited as much by the wine they had taken from the cellars of the Gaillards' house as by the terrible precision of the guns of Fléron. The Germans tried to take shelter as best they could from this murderous fire. At eleven o'clock another shell from the fort fell with a crash in front of the school, killing a horse and wounding several men. In a rage the soldiers rushed to the schoolmaster's house and took him and all his family prisoners, on the pretext that they had informed the fort, 3 kilometres away, of their presence. Refusing to listen to any explanation, they murdered him and three of his children, one of them a girl, and also the rural policeman. Three villagers from Forêt, brought to St.-Hadelin after a hard journey, met the same fate. The massacre continued and was accompanied by arson. The soldiers took prisoners the men who had taken refuge at the Jamme clothmills, and, adding to them some other civilians brought from Ayeneux, took them all towards Riessonsart. There the pitiful procession was swelled by some of the inhabitants, who in their innocence brought provisions with them!

All these prisoners, some hundred in number, were to be executed in small groups. Twenty-three victims had already fallen, crying "Long live Belgium!" when a horseman, coming up at a gallop, brought the Germans an order to leave immediately. The survivors were taken to Magnée and were forced to drag guns up a height between Forts Fléron and Chaudfontaine from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The discovery of a revolver and a small carbine hanging on a wall cost the life of other civilians at St.-Hadelin during this terrible night. About sixty civilians of St.-Hadelin and Riessonsart perished, during the night of the 5th and the day of the 6th, at the hands of the furious soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

The ancient village of Forêt, situated on a hill opposite St.-Hadelin also had its victims. While passing through on their way to attack the forts, the enemy plundered and burned. Six men, including

<sup>1</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 37 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> As to all these events see G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 96 et seq.: 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*. Letter announcing the death of the victims of St Hadelin, reproduced by H. Davignon in *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, at p. 58.

M. Rongy, the schoolmaster, were killed. Four more were taken to St.-Hadelin, where they were involved in the massacre already mentioned. M. Chabot, the parish priest, in company with two of his parishioners, underwent a veritable martyrdom. Having been used as a living shield against the fire of the forts, these men were put to death at Bouny.<sup>1</sup>

At Magny there was a veritable butchery. About two o'clock on the morning of the 6th August, the Germans arrived on their way up to Forts Fléron and Chaudfontaine. Their route was marked everywhere by murder and arson. Four men were killed before the soldiers reached the centre of the village at 4 a.m. There the troops divided; some went westward towards Romsée and the others eastward towards Soxhluse and Fort Fléron. At the village they shot another five inhabitants. The troops that departed for Fléron soon returned, having been repulsed by the Belgian fire. Furious at the losses they had sustained, the soldiers fired at the houses as they re-entered. Then they gave themselves up to plunder and arson and to ill-treating the inhabitants. Eight more were killed and others were taken from their houses and led off in different directions with their hands tied. Some were taken to Olne and used as shields for the Germans marching against Fort Chaudfontaine. The shells of Fort Fléron burst over the village and added to the horror of the situation. The parish priest was nearly shot by the enraged soldiers. The latter were frequently obliged to lie down to shelter themselves from the Belgian fire.<sup>2</sup>

At Romsée, situated between the two forts at Fléron and Chaudfontaine, the Germans arrived at three o'clock on the morning of the 6th August on their way up to Fléron. The fort received them with a hail of shrapnel and the Belgian infantry with a storm of musketry. The villagers paid for this repulse. They were dragged from their homes, and the men were shot, amid the weeping and the vain entreaties of their families. They were killed as chance offered. One would fall as he opened his door to the soldiers knocking at it, another would be killed in the midst of his family or on the public road. These crimes were committed by officers and men of the 35th German Regiment. There are nearly thirty names in the list of victims. The houses were looted and several of them set on fire.

Fort Fléron meanwhile continued to do execution. The colliery dispensary was filled with wounded Germans. All the houses near by were soon chockfull. The priest and the villagers, enrolled in the Red Cross, were under fire as they went to pick up the wounded. Finally they were arrested and charged with treachery and espionage. Taking advantage of a momentary confusion, they managed to escape along the railway line.

The women and children were driven from their homes and taken towards Fort Chaudfontaine. In the morning they were driven in front of the German artillery, which fired between them. The fort did not dare to reply in their direction, but five of these poor creatures were killed.<sup>3</sup>

While these events were taking place round Fléron and Chaudfontaine, the gap between Fléron and Evegnée was being attacked. In

<sup>1</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 106; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 103 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116 et seq.

this direction the 27th and 165th German Regiments came from the villages of Bouxhe-Mélen and Micheroux.

At 7 p.m. the Germans were 800 yards from Rétinne. They attacked the outposts of the garrison of Fort Evegnée. The gap between Fort Evegnée and Fort Fléron was defended by a trench 150 yards long at the hamlet of Surfossé. At 9 p.m. the soldiers of the 9th, 12th, and 14th Line Regiments were occupying the trench with two machine guns. Their total strength was only that of a few companies. At 11.30 p.m. a German advanced guard arrived at the village, set two farms and three other houses on fire and pushed back the sentries and a small Belgian detachment towards Liéry and Queue-du-Bois. At this moment the Belgians in the trench at Surfossé opened a murderous fire. After the first surprise, the enemy rallied and replied. Some advanced to attack the trench, which was protected by barbed-wire entanglements, others took cover behind the houses. The fighting continued in this way until 2.30 a.m. Then the Germans placed two guns and some machine guns in a farmyard, and kept up continuous fire on the trench. The Belgians resisted stubbornly for an hour. Finally the firing slackened and ceased at 4 a.m. The enemy lost in this combat about sixty killed and 200 wounded.<sup>1</sup>

During this attack on the Evegnée-Fléron gap, Commandant Munaut, a Belgian officer, gave his men a fine example of heroism. He was in the trench. The soldiers were receiving their baptism of fire, and he noticed that all, or nearly all, of them crouched against the scarp and placed their rifles at the loopholes without lifting their heads to aim. In this way they failed to hit the Germans who were assembling for an attack on the trench, sheltering along a hedge not 100 yards away. Their fire was no better than the Belgians'. It was necessary at any cost to stop their preparations for the attack. Commandant Munaut rebuked his men, saying, "My friends, the Germans are aiming so badly!" and to give them confidence he jumped on to the parapet and took a few steps with the enemy bullets whistling round him. He then got back to his place in the trench saying, "Well, are you convinced now that the Germans are aiming badly?"<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that the affecting notes pencilled by a private of the 9th Line Regiment, as events unrolled themselves before his eyes, relate to this night. They give so vivid an impression of the conditions under which the Belgians were fighting that night, that we have no hesitation in reproducing them here:—

*Wednesday, 11 p.m.*

We are in the trench, about fifty men of the 9th Line Regiment. The enemy seeks to pass to the right and left of us. We are more and more surrounded . . . there must be two or three regiments there. . . . There is a rain of bullets from all directions, but happily the shooting of our opponents is very bad.

Foreseeing a bayonet charge, I remove my knapsack. I take some things out of it among others my shoes, and begin to fire again. In fact, several minutes later the Germans try an assault, but are repulsed by volley firing.

<sup>1</sup> See the account by G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 122 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Commandant Munaut, written to correct a published account of the incident; cf. *Courrier de l'Armée* of 24th November 1914.

Thursday, 1 a.m.

The battle continues as fiercely as ever. The Germans do not know what strength against them and dare not advance. The darkness is a great help to us. Many of the enemy are sent towards us to find out the situation. They want to cut the barbed wire in front of the trenches so as to help their attack. Almost all are stopped on the way; one only, thanks to the darkness, got as far as a tree just above our trench. He will never tell what he saw.

1.30.

Our cartridges are giving out and our rifles are burning our hands: our men are like madmen. The end is approaching. Eighty yards away we see the flash of German rifles. Our forts are firing with wonderful precision. The searchlight weeps along and the shell bursts where the ray has passed, right in the middle of the Germans.

I fire. . . . I crouch down to reload; a ball goes through my shako at the same moment.

I have only fifteen cartridges left. My shots get slower and slower . . . every one is firing at longer intervals, taking careful aim. The Germans keep on advancing. They have got to within eight or ten yards of us.

I let them come, and have the immense pleasure of seeing nine of them fall in a half-hour under my last bullets.

2.30.

All is over. Each of the last cartridges hit its man. For four hours about fifty of us have held hundreds of Germans, and we are perishing for want of ammunition. Wonderful result, for we have only one killed and two wounded. I have fired about 250 cartridges.<sup>1</sup>

Though the assault on the side of Pontisse and Barchon and on the side of Boncelles had failed, there were, however, points where the line of defence began to give way under the repeated pressure of the enemy. On the morning of the 6th German troops succeeded in getting through between Barchon and the Meuse and in the Evegnée-Fléron gap. At Rétinne the Belgians, overwhelmed by numbers, had to retreat towards Saive and La Xhavée: about a hundred men, having taken a road too far to the right of the first-named place, were surrounded and made prisoners.<sup>2</sup>

The Fléron-Evegnée gap being forced and the road to Liège being freed, the invaders began to sing and to cheer and the trumpets to sound. They rushed at the double along the Liège road. At Liéry a dozen guns and some machine guns quenched their ardour. The fighting at this spot was murderous. The Belgian artillery was supported by the guns of Fort Fléron. As the Germans found great difficulty in advancing and were in a critical position, the houses falling down round them, General Von Wussow rushed to the head of his men to lead them on. A shell smashed his head. Colonel Krüger, Commandants Hildebrandt and Ribesalm, and Lieutenant Vogt also fell. The enemy lost eighty killed and 150 wounded. The Belgian Lieutenant Bronne perished with twenty of his men. At last, the artillery of the defence, being outflanked, retreated towards Liège, leaving ten soldiers and three officers in the hands of the enemy.<sup>3</sup> The enemy continued their march towards Liège by way of Queue-du-Bois, Bellaire, and Jupille, taking with them about fifty civilian prisoners from Rétinne, several of whom were over sixty years of age. At Liéry these poor creatures were put in front of the guns; then they were made to run in front of the troops, whilst the soldiers pricked

<sup>1</sup> Account published in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 30th October 1915.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124; Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

with their bayonets those who did not move quickly enough. The German rearguard, when passing through Rétinne, set fire to about fifteen houses and killed forty-one civilians, while the women and children were terrified by the usual methods.<sup>1</sup>

In their advance by the Queue-du-Bois-Bellaire-Jupille route the enemy forces which had broken through between Evegnée and Fléron still encountered resistance. At Queue-du-Bois the Belgians defended the ground foot by foot. Bitter fighting went on in the main road. At last the Belgians retired in good order before superior forces. The enemy immediately entered the village, shouting "Hoch!" and uttering savage yells. Seven civilians were immediately killed. Robbery and arson followed.<sup>2</sup>

The Belgian resistance was continued behind Bellaire, which, as it were, forms only a single village with Queue-du-Bois.<sup>3</sup> Commandant Munaut, of the 12th, defended the last line of the village with about fifty men from various companies. He contested the ground foot by foot. Suddenly he heard a voice calling to him from behind. A little corporal was lying on the ground, his breast pierced by a bullet. Munaut went to him. "Commandant," murmured the wounded man, "I am dying. Will you tell Commandant Gheur, who told us this morning to do our duty, that I did mine?" Then, summoning up all his strength, the wounded man turned his head towards the enemy, so that they might hear, and shouted "Long live the King! Long live Belgium!"<sup>4</sup>

At last the Belgians retired on Jupille. As the Germans passed through Bellaire they threw incendiary pastilles about, and killed three civilians, one of whom was over seventy and deaf.<sup>5</sup>

Although they had pierced the defence in several places, the enemy did not continue their advance on Liège during the morning of the 6th. They had suffered such heavy losses that they had to delay operations. On his side, General Leman, after mature consideration, had decided to order the 3rd Division and the 15th mixed brigade on the right bank of the Meuse to retire. Since the 4th August the troops had successively fought on all points of a front of 50 kilometres, repulsing by prodigies of valour and endurance the determined attacks of an enemy four times their number. They were exhausted, and in danger of being shut up in the city.

The Governor of Liège considered that the forts could still act as delaying forts, and that the moment had come to send the 3rd Division to rejoin the main army, which had now completed its concentration. The forts would retain their garrisons and were to resist to the last. Leman kept the military command, but forced his Staff to retire with the 3rd Division, although they entreated him to allow them to stay with him, and about midday he took up his position in Fort Loncin.<sup>6</sup>

One by one the troops who had held the gaps between the forts began their retirement. Soon the people of Liège saw them pass

<sup>1</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 125-7; *Réponse au Livre Blanc allemand*, pp. 133-4, 486.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 175 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Account in the *Courrier de l'Armée* of 24th November 1914.

<sup>5</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 176-8.

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 25-6.

through the city, infantry, artillery, lancers, and chasseurs. Eye-witnesses agree that the retreat never degenerated into a rout. "Suddenly," says one of them, "a number of Belgian guns came up the road. It was the retreat of the Belgian army which had defended the valley of the Vesdre. Behind the artillery galloped a troop of lancers. Then came some chasseurs, who sat down by the road and watched the guns coming up. The men accepted the bread offered to them and went away, eagerly munching it. A young chasseur suggested that they should stop and fire a few more shots at the enemy, whom we could not see, but who were in pursuit a little distance away. No. They had orders to retire, and they disappeared over the hill.

"Many more were seen later in the day, exhausted by fighting but still resolute. As their knapsacks began to weight them down, they threw them off by the wayside."<sup>1</sup>

Another witness says: "I can myself say that the retreat was effected in good order, as I accompanied the troops from the fifth post on the St.-Trond road, near Fort Loncin, as far as the centre of the city. The motor I was in easily made its way along."<sup>2</sup>

Doubtless a certain number remained behind and were taken, together with several guns. They were for the most part detached posts and stragglers, who had not received the order to retreat and reached Liège in the evening without expecting what was to happen.<sup>3</sup>

Among the men who were not informed of the order to retire was a detachment of about 800 men belonging to the 1st battalion of the 34th and to the 8th battalion of the 14th. Their wanderings are deserving of mention.<sup>4</sup> This detachment was entrenched on the plateau of Rond-Chêne, north of Embourg, and barred the way to the valleys of the Ourthe and the Vesdre. Constantly harried by various detachments of the 7th Army Corps, they made their share of prisoners and also killed a large number. On the 13th they were nearly surrounded; the enemy occupied Chênée, and from there came up to the plateau, which was at the same time shelled by siege guns.

The commandant of the detachment, who had learned on the 7th August of the departure of the 3rd Division, then made up his mind to escape by passing round outside the city by the south and thus attaining Awans, the point named by an order of General Leman. In the night the column passed the Ourthe, slipped through the woods, and reached the Meuse. The bridge of Seraing was cut, but that of Val-St.-Lambert remained. The soldiers crossed it in Indian file. At three o'clock on the 14th the column was at Awans. There it halted. Learning that German troops were working at entrenchments behind Fort Loncin, it went and dispersed them.

The retreat was then resumed in the direction of Namur, where 602 men arrived on the 16th August, after fifty-two hours of adventure and skirmishes, including twenty-seven hours of marching along by-roads. From Embourg to Awans they were accompanied by seven

<sup>1</sup> P. Hamelius, *The Siege of Liège*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège," in the *English Review* for April 1915, at p. 50 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 29-30.

German prisoners. They released them at Awans, but took two more at Villers-le-Bouillet, whom they proudly brought to Namur.<sup>1</sup>

In order to narrate this heroic episode, one among so many, we have somewhat anticipated events.

The retreat of the Belgian forces retiring from the gaps between the forts was not molested by the enemy, who had been too roughly handled to undertake a vigorous pursuit. He contented himself with advancing some 15-cm. guns as far as the plateau of Sart-Tilman, near Bonnelles, and to that of Robermont, behind Fléron, and with them he bombarded the city for the first time at 4 a.m. on the 6th August. On that day two hundred Germans entered Liège, but as prisoners.<sup>2</sup>

As to the march of the 3rd Division to rejoin the main army on the Gette, the troops assembled between Forts Loncin and Hollogne. Their retirement was scarcely disturbed by a few parties of uhlans and dragoons. A party of these cavalry tried an attack at Hollogne-sur-Geer; but, being taken between a squadron of lancers and a cyclist company, it was destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

Three hundred German dragoons occupied the Wood of Faimés, 4 kilometres from Waremme. The 11th Line Regiment received orders to dislodge them. Four Belgian soldiers with a corporal and a sergeant were placed on one of the ways of retreat of the Germans. Hidden under the railway bridge, opposite Wery's Mill at Waremme, they watched for the enemy. Suddenly there was a crackle of rifle fire, and they saw a party of retreating Germans coming straight towards them. The five Belgians opened a sustained fire. Some of the cavalry fell. Overcome with panic, the other dragoons threw away their arms and surrendered. There were thirty-seven of them, with an officer.<sup>4</sup>

The determined attitude of the Belgian patrols forced the enemy to keep a respectful distance. The mass of German cavalry that had crossed the Meuse on the 5th August and had assembled on the left bank were prevented by the Belgian Cavalry Division from troubling the retreat of the 3rd Division. In the evening of the 6th the division reached the Geer, and on the 8th it rejoined the rest of the army in position on the Gette.<sup>5</sup>

The King welcomed them in the following Order of the Day:—

7th August 1914.

Our comrades of the 3rd Army Division and of the 15th mixed brigade are about to re-enter our lines after defending like heroes the fortified position of Liège.

Attacked by forces four times their number, they have repulsed every attack; no fort has been taken; the fortress of Liège is still in our power.

Flags and many prisoners form the trophies of those days.

In the name of the Nation I greet you, officers and men of the 3rd Division and 15th mixed brigade. You have done your duty. You have brought honour to our arms and shown the enemy what it costs to make an unjust attack upon a peaceful nation, which derives invincible force from the justice of its cause. The country is rightly proud of you.

<sup>1</sup> See the account "La retraite des 800," in *Récits de combattants*, p. 36-42.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Account in the *Courrier de l'Armée*.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 26; *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 13.



Soldiers of the Belgian army, do not forget that you are the advance guard of the immense armies of this gigantic struggle, and that we but await the arrival of our brothers in arms before marching to victory. The eyes of the whole world are on you. Show by the vigour of your blows that you mean to live free and independent.

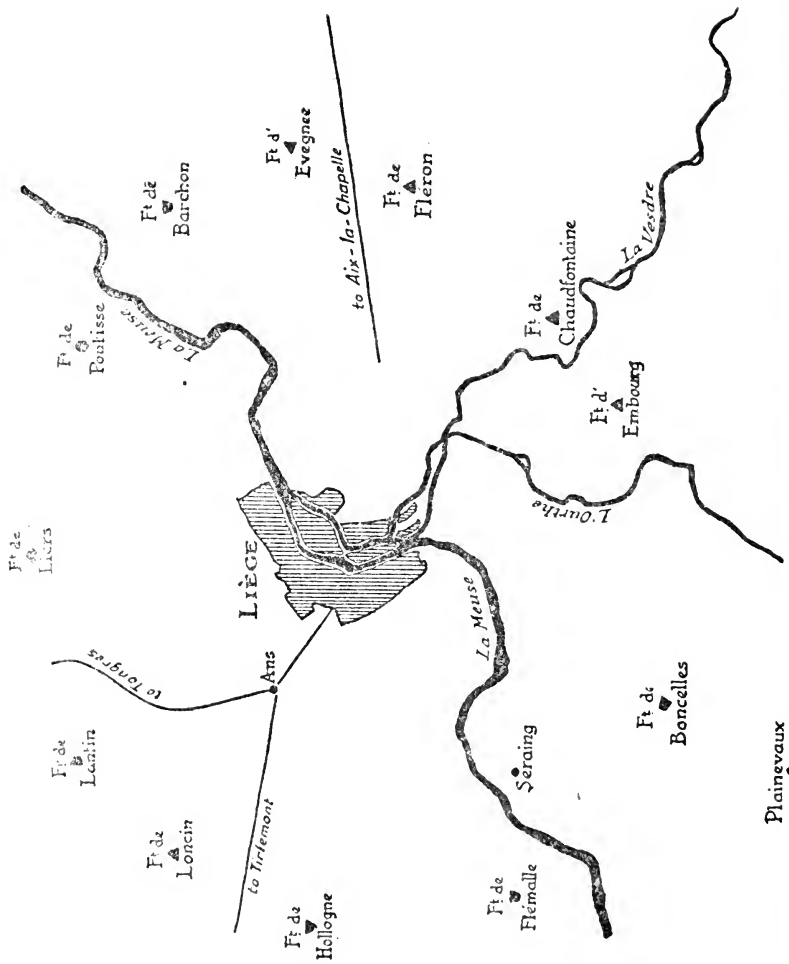
France, that noble country, associated in history with just and generous causes, is coming to our aid, and her armies are entering our land. In your name I extend to them a fraternal greeting.

ALBERT.<sup>1</sup>

These royal praises were amply deserved. During the attack on Liège the army of General Von Emmich had been severely handled.

It left in the hands of the Belgians two flags, and its officially admitted losses amounted to 42,712 men.

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 26-7.



THE LIÈGE FORTS.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GERMANS AT LIÈGE—HEROIC RESISTANCE OF THE FORTS

WHEN the retreat of the troops defending the gaps between the forts began, the population of the places within the lines of defence rushed in terror into the streets of Liège. They swept along with them the civic guards who had guarded the approaches to the city and had carried out their obligations of "fortress service" prescribed for times of war.<sup>1</sup> Since the night before, the people of Liège had been anxious what the morrow had in store. The householders had found in their letter-boxes a circular from the burgomaster laying down the attitude to be adopted if the enemy were to occupy the town.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the absence of any other official communication, the inhabitants of Liège knew that they might see the enemy enter the city.

Towards midday<sup>3</sup> the bombardment began again, and about thirty shells fell in Liège, but without causing very much damage. About 11.30 the echo of a very loud explosion shook the air. It was the Pont des Arches, which the Belgian engineers had blown up. The other bridges remained intact, and for reasons still unknown no one thought of destroying the Val Benoit bridge, which carried the railway which gave access to the left bank of the Meuse. During the second bombardment, which lasted from midday until 2 p.m., several projectiles fell on the citadel. The little garrison at once began to set fire to the provisions stored there and to render unusable some old guns which were used for drilling by the civic guard. At 10 a.m. the citadel was evacuated. Several men were left behind to get rid of anything that might be of use to the enemy.

Meanwhile Burgomaster Kleyer awaited at the town-hall the entry of the invaders. At 3.30 p.m. a German flag of truce came and demanded the immediate surrender of the city and forts, otherwise the city would be subjected to a fresh bombardment. General Leman, apprised of this summons, told the burgomaster that he refused to surrender the forts, and that the city of Liège ought to be ready to make this fresh sacrifice in the interests of the country.

In consequence of the Governor's refusal, German shells again fell on Liège from 9 p.m. until 2 a.m. The enemy's guns fired at half-hour intervals. This bombardment caused fires in the Rue de Hasque and the Rue de la Commune.

At midnight Liège had assumed a sinister aspect. The streets were deserted, the houses closed, and the people had taken refuge from the

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; P. Hamelius, *The Siege of Liège*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> The details following are taken from the works of Ch. Bronne and P. Hamelius.

effect of the bombardment in their cellars. At 2 a.m. the German batteries ceased fire, only to resume an hour later. This time they aimed above all at the citadel, where, as we have stated, there remained a few soldiers. These at last retired, after setting the last of the provisions on fire.

On Friday the 7th August, at 5 a.m., the first German troops ventured into the city, crossing the bridges that had not been destroyed. They came mainly by way of Jupille and Bois-de-Theux. They took immediate possession of the bridges, and one detachment pushed on rapidly as far as the Place de Bavière. The citadel and the Provincial Palace were soon occupied. In the afternoon, according to some witnesses, the Germans occupied the station, where they found an ambulance train, about twenty locomotives, and a great quantity of provisions which could not be removed or destroyed owing to the rapidity of the retreat.

The first measures of the invader were to disarm the civic guard, and to take hostages, responsible for the peaceful behaviour of their fellow-citizens. Count Lammsdorf, Chief of Staff of the 10th Army Corps, went to the town-hall and arrested the burgomaster, who was taken to the citadel. There he was informed that if the forts did not surrender the city would again be bombarded. He was offered a safe-conduct to go and discuss the matter either with General Leman or the King. Meanwhile a meeting of important citizens of Liège had been held at the town-hall and decided that some of their number, including the Bishop and the burgomaster, should try to obtain a safe-conduct to go to Fort Loncin and learn from the Governor whether he still considered that the surrender of the forts was impossible. When they reached the citadel to ask for passports, these leading citizens were arrested on the pretext that German soldiers had been killed in the villages in the neighbourhood. For three days they were shut up in the casements of the citadel and kept on bread and water. Among them were the Bishop and the burgomaster.

The city was then in the power of the conqueror. The last train left Liège about 9 a.m., taking to Brussels about five thousand fugitives from the city and the suburbs. All communication between Liège and the rest of the country was not, however, entirely cut off. Some people of Liège, who were trying to escape from the city, learned to their astonishment that trains were still leaving the station on the plateau of Ans. They went thither and found that, as the station was covered by the guns of Loncin, the Germans had not dared to venture thus far; from time to time trains were still leaving for Brussels.

This incident illustrates in a concrete manner the importance of the resistance of the forts of Liège after the occupation of the city itself. The occupation did not give the invader any strategic advantage. The importance of Liège to the Germans was that the place was a necessary part of their lines of communication with Germany, owing to the railway lines that it commanded. But so long as the forts held out, Liège was merely a terminus and not a junction for the invaders.<sup>1</sup> Pontisse and Barchon menaced the crossing of the Meuse north of the city, and Flémalle and Boncelles fulfilled the same function on the south. Fort Embourg dominated the valley of the Ourthe for several

<sup>1</sup> See J. Buchan, *op. cit.* p. 104.

miles. Fléron and Chaudfontaine held the Aix-la-Chapelle line under their guns. Lastly, Loncin barred all advance to Brussels.

The artillery which General Von Emmich's army then had at its disposal was not of sufficient calibre to reduce the large forts by bombardment. The Germans had not expected serious resistance. They therefore had to wait for the arrival of 28-cm. guns.<sup>1</sup> From the 8th to the 10th August General Von Emmich's army remained quiet, resting after its labours and reforming out of the range of the forts. The latter, during the first days after the retreat of the 3rd Division, shelled all troops that passed within range, and destroyed by accurate fire the pontoons that the enemy was throwing across the Meuse in their neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> In order to gain protection from this fire, which considerably hampered their movements, the Germans more than once sheltered themselves behind groups of civilians, men and children, whom they forced to march in front of them.

A conspicuous case was that of the people of Soumagne on the 6th August, who were made to leave the church, where they had been shut up to the number of about three hundred, bound in fours, and forced by the soldiers to march in front of them while they traversed the distance between Forts Evegnée and Fléron.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards these poor creatures were placed on the bridges of Liège, so as to prevent the Belgian artillery from destroying them. The same thing was witnessed on the 12th August, when the Germans drove in front of them some civilians, including children, when they came within range of Fléron.<sup>4</sup>

General Leman remained in constant communication from Loncin, where he had retired, with the commandants of the other forts. Many soldiers volunteered to take messages from one work to another, making their way by devious paths to avoid falling into the hands of the Germans. The latter had succeeded in getting between the forts in fairly large numbers and had established themselves in places where the folds of the ground prevented the Belgian guns from reaching them. Several Belgian messengers fell in with these detachments and were taken prisoners or killed. At last the forts were completely surrounded and isolated from one another.<sup>5</sup>

Before the heavy siege guns arrived from Germany, the enemy had vigorously bombarded Forts Barchon and Evegnée. These two forts covered by their fire the plateau of Herve, over which the siege guns had to come. The Verviers line was unusable, and it took a month to restore it. The Belgian engineers had blown up the tunnel at Bellevaux, and driven fourteen locomotives at full speed along the line. They had crashed up against the rocks.<sup>6</sup>

There only remained for the transport of the siege guns the single track by Herve, which was under the threat of the guns from Fléron

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 27. It is not true that Austrian 30·5-cm. howitzers were used at Liège. These guns made their first appearance at Namur.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27; see the testimony of L. Mokveld, *The German Fury in Belgium*, pp. 23, 24, 29, 32, 50, 51, 58-61, London, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence and Documents, deposition 91.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>6</sup> "L'invasion allemande au pays de Verviers," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* for 27th July 1915.

and Evegnée. The first German siege piece came by way of Henri-Chapelle, in two pieces drawn by two locomotives.<sup>1</sup>

Forts Barchon and Evegnée were therefore attacked before the arrival of the 28-cm. guns. The rugged configuration of the country, deeply pierced by the Berwine and its tributaries, and with many hills from 600 to 1,000 feet high, did not permit them to reply adequately to the German batteries, whose exact position was not known.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the observation station at Barchon no longer existed, and it was impossible to direct the fire.<sup>3</sup> Barchon and Evegnée surrendered a week before most of the other forts—Barchon on Sunday the 9th August and Evegnée on Monday the 10th.<sup>4</sup> Through the breach thus effected four siege howitzers were soon afterwards brought into the city of Liège.<sup>5</sup>

The bombardment of the forts began about midday on the 12th August.<sup>6</sup> Boncelles and Embourg were bombarded from the Tilff Hill, whilst the forts on the left bank, Loncin, Lantin, Liers, and Pontisse, were taken in reverse, i.e. by guns placed in Liège itself and on the heights of the citadel.<sup>7</sup> These guns accordingly fired at the rear of the forts, where an attack was not foreseen and the power of resistance was least.<sup>8</sup>

Fort Pontisse fell on the 13th August.<sup>9</sup> After the unsuccessful attack on the night of the 5th August, fighting still went on in the neighbourhood, for example, at Rhées, which is only divided from the fort by the small wood of Pontisse and the trial ground of the gun foundry. Detachments of Belgian infantry, perhaps part of the garrison of the fort or a body that had not received the order for the retreat of the 3rd Division, were fighting there on the night of the 6th. Early on Friday the 7th they retired to the fort. About 5 a.m. the rear-guard, closely followed by the Germans, turned round and charged the enemy. A desperate combat took place in the streets. The ground was disputed foot by foot. Many Germans fell, including a lieutenant-colonel. About seven o'clock the Belgians were again under the guns of the fort, and things became quiet.<sup>10</sup>

This reverse cost the people of Rhées, against whom the enemy turned his anger, the death of seven civilians, who were shot and bayoneted. Subsequent murders increased the number to twenty.<sup>11</sup>

The same morning, Friday the 7th, a Belgian patrol of the 14th Line Regiment, attached to Fort Pontisse, went and disarmed the fifty-five wounded left behind at Hermée by the enemy on the night of the 5th August, and declared them prisoners. These small patrols moved about round from the fort until the day that it fell.<sup>12</sup> Thus, on the 13th August, a German officer was killed at Vivegnies by a soldier from the fort, on guard at the road ascending from Oupeye.

<sup>1</sup> "L'invasion allemande au pays de Verviers," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* for 27th July 1915.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 154, 177.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 154, 177.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>7</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

<sup>8</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* p. 158.

<sup>9</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège"; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 216. <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17. <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

The two comrades of the man who was slain turned back, but returned in a short time at the head of two hundred or three hundred men. Accusing the people of Vivegnies of killing the officer, they shot six of them, including two women and an old man of seventy.<sup>1</sup>

On Wednesday the 12th, at 9 p.m., the German heavy artillery reached the district of Oupeye. The regiment escorting the guns made the burgomaster and the parish priest of Heure-le-Romain march in the front rank. The bombardment of the fort began about midday and lasted till about 2 p.m. the next day. Then the fort surrendered.<sup>2</sup>

The same day there fell the forts at Embourg, Chaudfontaine, and Flémalle. Embourg surrendered after twenty-six hours' bombardment. At Chaudfontaine, the enemy's fire exploded the powder magazine. One hundred and ten artillerymen were terribly burned, and fifty died.<sup>3</sup>

Liers and Fléron fell on the following day. Liers was demolished by the guns placed by the Germans at St. Walburge.<sup>4</sup> Fléron, under the command of Commandant Mausin, had by its fire caused the enemy heavy losses.

To force the surrender of the fort, the Germans had terrorized the people of the village lower down. They shut up two hundred of them in the church and kept them there for a night. They ill-used the priests who intervened. The curate, who belonged to the Red Cross, was taken by eight soldiers towards the fort under the threat of death if the fort fired. Seeing a priest surrounded by soldiers, it did not do so.

German flags of truce kept on coming to the fort; they stated that they were about to use very large shells, 42-cm. guns, and asphyxiants. It made no difference. This obstinate resistance caused the Germans much worry. Thus, the Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, who had taken up his quarters at M. Philippart's villa at Herve, told the inhabitants of Herve who had been brought there as hostages: "The resistance of Fort Fléron is a useless piece of barbarity on the part of the commandant. Perhaps he wishes to have a soldier's death. Well, he will die! A useless sacrifice. . . ."

On Monday the 10th August, some officers asked the magistrate of Herve to go as a flag of truce to the forts at Fléron and Evegnée and ask the defenders to surrender. He declined the mission.

He was then taken in a motor out of the town, and for an hour and a half was made to watch the armies passing in a continuous column. "This has been going on everywhere for days," he was told, "and there are more still as far as the other side of Aix-la-Chapelle. At least tell the commandants of the forts that; they will understand the uselessness of their resistance."

The officers then took him to Fort Evegnée, carrying white flags. They met another motor carrying a Belgian officer prisoner. He was, they said, the commandant of Evegnée. The fort had just fallen. The motor then went towards Fléron. The commandant of the fort met them. The magistrate explained what he had seen. As one of the German officers was examining the fort, Commandant Mausin spoke to him sharply and ordered him to turn his head. To the invitation to

<sup>1</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège"; Cte. G. de Ribaucourt, "Chaudfontaine (août 1914)," in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 43-52.

<sup>4</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

surrender, Mausin replied: "My answer is emphatic. No! gentlemen. Your mission is at an end." The motor went away, and a furious cannonade began again.<sup>1</sup> The fort resisted for three days longer. On the 14th August, surrender was suddenly decided upon. During the last twelve hours the work had received three thousand shells and as many had fallen in the neighbouring fields. They were afraid that the powder magazine would blow up. Moreover, as the German artillery were in positions difficult or impossible to reach, the fort could no longer fire with effect. When it surrendered, according to one version, it only had two sentries killed, one suffocated, and ten wounded, but the terrible efficiency of its fire had spread death everywhere within range of it.<sup>2</sup> According to another version, which is not very probable, it was demolished by the fire of a group of twenty guns linked by electricity. It is more probable that it was reduced by the fire of the heavy siege guns from Liège.

The surrender saved the lives of the priests of Magnée and Heusay and six people of the latter village. Major Schemnitz, of the 38th German Regiment, had decided to have them shot if Fléron did not surrender.<sup>3</sup> We hasten to add that the commandant of the fort knew nothing of this threat, which did not form one of the reasons for the surrender.

On the 15th August it was the turn of the forts at Boncelles, Loncin, and Lantin. The last works fell on the 16th and 17th.<sup>4</sup>

It is possible to form some idea of the heroism of the garrisons of the forts and of the horrors of the bombardment to which they were subjected by reading the details given to us of the defence of Boncelles and Loncin.

After the furious attack on Boncelles during the night of the 5th August, the assailants abandoned all hope of taking it by assault. From the 6th to the 13th August the garrison saw no enemies about, save on one day when the Germans attempted to dig trenches on the plateau of Cointe, 7 kilometres from the fort. A few shells cleared the plateau.

On the 13th August the heavy siege artillery arrived for the bombardment of Boncelles. The enemy guns were so placed that the artillerymen in the fort could not reach their position or reply to their fire. They were unable to assist Fort Embourg, which was violently bombarded by the enemy. The brave commandant, Lefert, who, as we have said, had been treacherously wounded by enemies who pretended to surrender, continued to conduct the defence in spite of his sufferings. At last he became delirious and the officers had him sent to Liège to be attended to in hospital.

At 6 a.m. on the 14th August two shrapnel shells burst over the fort: the enemy were trying to ascertain the exact range. Shortly afterwards the bombardment began, and lasted all day until 8 p.m. The telephones had been destroyed: it was impossible to reply to the enemy fire. The order was given to close the cupolas and stoically await events.

At 8 p.m. two men came under flag of truce. They demanded, in French, the surrender of the fort. "You are able to judge of the

<sup>1</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, pp. 76-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."



formidable power of our guns," they said; "your fort has been hit by 278 shells, but we have other guns still more formidable. Your destruction will be instantaneous. Surrender."

The Belgian officers replied: "Our honour forbids us to surrender. We will resist until the end." At this proud answer the garrison burst into applause.

Half an hour later, the bombardment began again, this time from two different directions. The chimney of the engine-room collapsed, severely burning the engineer. Fire broke out, but was got under control. The electric light went out. Asphyxiating gases developed and spread through the galleries. The men were driven from one room to another, while overhead the thunder of explosions went on unceasingly.

At 6 a.m. the next day, the 15th August, the armoured concrete rooms that protected the guns began to crumble under the incessant shocks and the blows of huge shells. Several of the cupolas no longer revolved. The wounded needed attention, which could not be given so long as this storm of iron and fire enveloped the fort. It was decided to surrender, and three white flags were hoisted on the fort.

While the Germans approached to take possession of the work, the garrison flooded the powder magazines, broke the guns and rifles, and rendered unusable everything that might be of assistance to the enemy. The fort of Boncelles had held out for eleven days, and was now simply a heap of ruins.<sup>1</sup>

The fury of the Germans was vented particularly on the fort of Loncin, where General Leman had retired, and which barred access to the plains of Brabant. The defence was directed by Commandant Naessens and Lieutenant Modard, under the orders of the Governor himself.<sup>2</sup> The terrific bombardment to which Fort Loncin was subjected may be divided into three phases. The first began on the 14th August at 3 a.m. The shells came almost without ceasing until evening. The damage caused by the enemy fire was considerable. The escarpment, the protecting walls, and the ventilators suffered most. Deleterious and asphyxiating gases rendered it impossible to remain in the underground compartments. The garrison were compelled to withdraw into the interior and the galleries.

The second phase began at 5.30 a.m. on the 15th August and lasted until 2 p.m. Blow after blow of the giant shells fell like battering rams on the roof of the commandant's post, where Leman and his two assistants were, shaking the whole work with their deafening noise. At two o'clock the bombardment again ceased. The General took advantage of the short respite to make a general inspection of the fort. He found it partially in ruins. Yet there was no thought of surrender. Soon the enemy batteries began to fire again, this time with unheard-of violence. It seemed to the defenders of Loncin that the German batteries were firing regular volleys. The shells came with a shrill whistle which, as they got nearer, sounded like a storm, and then burst on the fort with a heavy clap of thunder. At one time Leman wished

<sup>1</sup> The details of this account are taken from the diary of an engineer soldier belonging to the garrison of Boncelles. The diary was published in an English translation in the issue of *The Times* for 6th October 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. Bronne, "The Defence of Liège."

to go to the commandant's post to see what was occurring, but he had hardly taken a few paces in the gallery before he fell face downwards, knocked down by a violent displacement of air. He got up and tried to go on, but poisonous gas drove him back into the gallery. Every one was succumbing to asphyxia, when Major Collard had the idea of opening the top of the shutter to get some air. Filled with the idea of putting the heroic garrison into as much safety as possible, Leman succeeded in reaching the post directing the fire. He was still there when, at 5.20 p.m., the fort blew up, burying everybody under its ruins. The glorious resistance of Fort Loncin was over.<sup>1</sup>

In a touching letter which he wrote to the King a few days later, the defender of Liège himself describes the last moments of this heroic episode :—

SIRE,

After honourable combats fought by the 3rd Division on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of August, reinforced on the 5th by the 15th Brigade, I came to the conclusion that the forts of Liège could only act as delaying forts. I nevertheless retained the military governorship so as to exercise a moral influence on the garrisons of the forts. The wisdom of this decision has been fully confirmed by events.

Your Majesty is aware that I took up my post in Fort Loncin about midday on the 6th August.

Sire,

You will learn with grief that this fort was blown up yesterday about 5.20 p.m., burying under its ruins the greater part of the garrison, perhaps eight-tenths.

The explosion was caused by an unusually powerful artillery after a violent bombardment. The fort was not at all calculated to resist such powerful means of destruction.

If I did not perish in this catastrophe, it was because my escort, consisting of Major Collard, a non-commissioned officer of infantry, gendarme Thévenin, and the two orderlies (Ch. Vandebossche and Jos. Lecoq) carried me from the part of the fort where I was being suffocated by the gases of the explosions. I went to the ditch, where I fell. A German captain, named Gruson, gave me something to drink. I was made prisoner and then taken to Liège in an ambulance.

The German artillery, in *crushing* the fort to pieces, had caused such a heap of debris and blocks of concrete in the ditch that they made a veritable dyke running from the counterscarp, thus making a direct path for the German infantry.

I am confident that I have upheld the honour of our arms. I have surrendered neither the fortress nor the forts.

Deign to pardon, Sire, the faults of this letter. I am physically absolutely exhausted by the explosion at Loncin.

In Germany, whither I am to be taken, my thoughts as ever will be of Belgium and her King. I would willingly have offered up my life in their service, but death did not want me.<sup>2</sup>

Thus ended the resistance of the forts of Liège.

<sup>1</sup> See the article "Fort de Loncin" in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 53-64, and L. Mokveld, *The German Fury in Belgium*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 28-9.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BARBARIANS AT WORK

THE tactics of German warfare, in the rapid advance across a hostile territory, would evidently comprise the neutralization, by terror, of the strategic points within reach of fortified places, of military works, and of lines of communication. Everything tends to show that these lines had been, in the case of Belgium, previously determined; but others would be without doubt settled by circumstances.

Thus M. Henri Davignon expresses himself in his remarkable study, *Les procédés de guerre des Allemands en Belgique*.<sup>1</sup> To these considerations we may add that each time that the German army found its advance arrested by a successful resistance of the Belgian troops, it immediately revenged itself upon the civil population of the locality or of its vicinity.<sup>2</sup>

These observations adequately explain what took place in the vicinity of Liège during the first two weeks of the invasion.

Two periods, however, must be distinguished in the series of the excesses committed by the German troops in this region: these periods are separated by a significant date, that of the 9th August.

On that day, the German troops being already in possession of the city of Liège (whilst the forts still continued to resist), the German Government, through the medium of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, offered to conclude an agreement with Belgium as soon as the latter desisted from resistance.<sup>3</sup>

The following is the text of the proposal as transmitted to the Belgian Minister at The Hague:—

The fortress of Liège has been taken by assault after a brave defence. The German Government most deeply regret that bloody encounters should have resulted from the Belgian Government's attitude towards Germany. Germany is not coming as an enemy into Belgium. It is only through the force of circumstances that she has had, owing to the military measures of France, to take the grave decision of entering Belgium and occupying Liège as a base for her further military operations. Now that the Belgian army has upheld the honour of its arms in the most brilliant manner by its heroic resistance to a very superior force, the German Government beg

<sup>1</sup> Extract from *Le Correspondant*, 25th January 1915, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> See 12<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (conclusions générales)*, as well as 15<sup>e</sup> *Rapport* and the introduction of 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport*. See also the conclusions of the *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (Lord Bryce).

<sup>3</sup> The Minister of the United States at Brussels had refused to transmit the communication to the Belgian Government, asserting that "he had received no special instructions from Washington to intervene officially with the Belgian Government in the interest of Germany" (First Belgian Grey Book, No. 62.) The German Ambassador at The Hague then requested the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs to act as intermediary.

the King of the Belgians and the Belgian Government to spare Belgium the horrors of war. The German Government are ready for any compact with Belgium which can in any way be reconciled with their arrangements with France. Germany gives once more her solemn assurance that she has not been animated by the intention of appropriating Belgian territory for herself, and that such an intention is far from her thoughts. Germany is still ready to evacuate Belgium as soon as the state of war will allow her to do so.

The United States Ambassador here concurs in this attempt at mediation by his colleague in Brussels.<sup>1</sup>

On the 12th August Belgium replied to this proposal in the following terms:—

Please communicate the following telegram to the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Affairs:—

The proposal made to us by the German Government repeats the proposal which was formulated in the ultimatum of 2nd August. Faithful to her international obligations, Belgium can only reiterate her reply to that ultimatum, the more so as since 3rd August, her neutrality has been violated, a distressing war has been waged on her territory, and the guarantors of her neutrality have responded loyally and without delay to her appeal.<sup>2</sup>

These two dates should be noticed, the 9th and the 12th August. On the 9th the series of excesses committed by the Germans around Liège ceased; on the 12th it recommenced in a more violent form; that was after the refusal of the Belgian Government to discontinue its resistance.

Before the 9th August, the atrocities were committed in consequence of the check which the enemy had encountered during his attack upon the connecting works and the forts. After the fall of the city of Liège (on Friday the 7th) they were continued, partly to impress the garrisons of the forts and the inhabitants of Liège, and partly also because new troops had, in the meantime, entered Belgium, and had their heads filled with stories of francs-tireurs, and fantastic tales of atrocities committed by the Belgian civil population against the German soldiers.

The following extract from a letter addressed to a German soldier by his brother from Schleswig on the 25th August will sufficiently explain the mentality of the German troops at this epoch:—

Thou wilt presently go to Brussels with thy regiment, as thou knowest. Be well on thy guard against the civilians, particularly in the villages. Do not permit thyself to be approached by any of them. Fire, without pity, at every one who comes too near thee. The Belgians are very sly fellows and very cunning; the women and children are also armed and shoot. Never enter a house; particularly do not enter one alone. If thou drinkest, make the people drink first, and always keep at a distance from them. In the newspapers many instances are mentioned of their firing upon soldiers whilst they were drinking. You soldiers ought to spread such terror around you that no civilian would dare to approach you. Do thou keep always with others. I hope that thou hast read the newspapers and knowest how to conduct thyself. Above all, have no compassion on these assassins. Go for them without pity with butt and bayonet.<sup>3</sup>

Also the soldier Karl Barthel remarks in his diary of the campaign, under date of the 10th August: "We dined at Minden (Germany) in a

<sup>1</sup> First Belgian Grey Book, Nos. 60 and 62 (with annexes).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 71.

<sup>3</sup> See complete text and facsimile of this letter in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, pp. 100-1.

tavern. We were everywhere received and cared for with the greatest courtesy. We heard here the story of the acts of ferocity and cruelty committed by the Belgians at Liège."<sup>1</sup>

Having been thus prepared, the German troops arrived in the villages around Liège, and "went for them" indeed "without pity."

On the other hand, on the 12th August and from that date onwards, Belgium could expect, by virtue of the German communication itself, "the further horrors of war," inasmuch as she refused to cease from resistance. The German Government even avails itself of diplomatic means to inform Belgium that for the future the war will assume a cruel character (*einen grausamen Charakter*).<sup>2</sup>

This explanation will suffice to show why, after a comparative calm between the 9th and 12th August, the atrocities recommenced with fresh vigour.

It remains to record briefly the excesses committed during the two periods that have been mentioned, so as to complete the picture of what passed in the region of Liège up to a date after the fall of the last forts.

We have already described the horrors to which the population was subjected in consequence of the check in the attack on the forts on the 5th and 6th August. There are, however, some which it is impossible to connect with the actual attack upon Liège; and these must be regarded rather as isolated cases of a general system of terrorization.

At Soiron, on the evening of the 4th August, German soldiers (*chasseurs*), coming from Verviers, entered the château of the Baron de Woelmont. Having installed themselves, they began by getting drunk. Those who had not been able to enter the château remained in the park, highly discontented. Suddenly a shot sounded. Those who were carousing in the château came out and began to fire. Their companions left in the park responded. Some men were killed and others wounded. As a result, the guardian of the château was accused of having fired: so they proceeded to drag him from the cellar where he had hidden himself with two other men, and shot them all. A butcher of the village was also killed.<sup>3</sup>

At the other extremity of the province of Liège, between Gemmenich and the Meuse, the villages of Fourn-St.-Martin, Fourn-le-Comte, Warsage, Berneau and Mouland suffered the rage of the invaders. At Fourn-St.-Martin twenty houses were set on fire on the 6th August, and at least three of the inhabitants killed. One of these was massacred at the moment when he was opening his door to soldiers who had come to knock towards midnight. Fourn-le-Comte was pillaged on the 4th and 5th August; several

<sup>1</sup> Dossier of the English Ministry of War (cf. H. Davignon, *op. cit.* p. 101). Respecting the legends which circulated in Germany and among the German soldiers, regarding atrocities committed by the Belgians, see F. Van Langenhove, *Comment naît un cycle de légendes. Francs-tireurs et atrocités en Belgique*, Paris and Lausanne, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 14; E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* p. 198. This notification was made on the 14th August. See also the telegram sent by the Kaiser to President Wilson (E. Waxweiler, *op. cit.* p. 199).

<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 91 et seq.

houses were set on fire and hostages taken. The remainder of the population took refuge in Holland.<sup>1</sup>

At Berneau the invaders behaved like madmen. Beginning from the night of the 4th August, they plundered, got drunk, and quarrelled among themselves, concluding with "sniping" one another. They then accused the inhabitants of having fired on them, killed seven, and then set the village on fire. Of 115 houses about forty remained. On the 9th April 1915 the bodies of three women were exhumed.<sup>2</sup>

At Moulant, the Germans, not having been able to cross the Meuse on the 4th August, returned and began to pillage and to drink. Four men were shot; others were carried off to Germany.

At Julémont, gun-shots were heard during the night. The soldiers came to the conclusion that civilians had fired; whereupon—pillage, and burning of houses! Furniture, crockery, linen were heaped upon wagons and started for the frontier. A dozen inhabitants were killed. Two buildings alone, the house of the rural police and a free school, escaped the fire. The remainder of the inhabitants took flight.<sup>3</sup>

At Warsage a veritable tragedy occurred. During the afternoon of the 4th August a part of the German army was brought to a stop in the village, in consequence of the resistance offered by the Belgians at the ford of Visé. The inhabitants exerted themselves to furnish the soldiers with all that they asked. On the morning of the 5th August the Meuse was still impassable, and the enemy began to become excited. In the afternoon from two to three hundred Germans returned from Berneau to Warsage in a paroxysm of rage. They related that they had just burned Berneau, that they had there shot several civilians "because they had shot at them and poisoned several of their wounded." The presence of these excited soldiers made a vivid impression upon the inhabitants; and at nightfall they took refuge in their cellars, where they could hear the uninterrupted circulation of motors and of other vehicles of different kinds, which continued all night. On the 6th August, in the morning, Warsage was evacuated: the Germans were now bivouacking on the road to Aubel.

Suddenly, at the beginning of the afternoon, the soldiers came back towards Warsage, firing at the windows and riddling the houses. At the order of a German officer the inhabitants were assembled in the public square. Three inhabitants had already fallen, killed by the soldiers. On reaching the public square the inhabitants were informed that a German officer had been killed, and that an inhabitant of Warsage was accused of the act. Vain protestations and attempts at explanation ensued. All of a sudden—a whistle, and pillagers and incendiaries set to work. Furniture, linen, blankets, clothes, crockery, and wine are loaded on the motors and vans which defile towards the frontier. Afterwards a score of houses are burned.

The German officer had been killed before an uninhabited villa: this was surrounded, ransacked, and burned. No one was discovered there. A little later a German soldier was arrested, because he was suspected of the act. This, however, in no way arrested the revenge.

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 165 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête.*

The soldiers seized the burgomaster, M. Fléchet, and a group of the inhabitants and led them in the direction of Fouron, whilst the village was burned. Such of the inhabitants as remained free took flight to the woods. The prisoners were subsequently conducted to Mouland, knocked about with rifle-butts, and insulted by the troops which they passed on their way. At nightfall six of the prisoners were shot, whilst the others were informed that their turn would come soon.

The unfortunates passed a terrible night; they were struck and tortured. The burgomaster alone (who had managed to make an impression on the officers by speaking of exalted German personages with whom he was acquainted) and two young girls were not ill-treated. At morning the prisoners were made to walk about the fields, and were exhibited to the troops. When the soldiers began to depart, proceedings were taken for an execution. A gallows was improvised between two poplars. Six of the prisoners were hanged in the presence of their compatriots. The survivors were sent to Bombaye. There, the parish priest having resolutely made himself responsible for his parishioners, they were all set free, on the condition that the commune should hand over to the soldiers all the provisions which it possessed.

These exploits were the work of the 16th, 73rd, and 123rd Regiments of infantry, if one may believe the results of an inquiry made on the spot.<sup>1</sup>

The same day, the 6th August, saw a continuation of the excesses already committed the previous day at Chanxhe and at the hamlets of Sprimont. At Chanxhe the whole of the 6th August was passed in driving the men out of the houses and tying them up on the bridge over the Ourthe. The intervention of the parish priest, who obtained the release of those for whom he pledged his life, prevented a great number of these prisoners from being shot. Three young men who, in the evening, were returning by the side of the railway were arrested and shot.

On Friday the 7th, in the evening, two other men were shot; and the parish priest, guarded by a picket of hussars, was compelled to go into all the houses and to collect the men and the young people. Those who were found were imprisoned for the night in the church. This measure was taken every evening until the 13th August. On Tuesday the 18th, the parish priest was again arrested upon a pretext that some one had fired from the houses of the village. That night some soldiers who had got drunk at the bar of the workmen's club had quarrelled and fired their guns.

The hamlets of Sprimont furnished forty-five victims. For more than a fortnight their inhabitants were arrested, and afterwards set free, only to fall again into the hands of each new detachment that reached these parts.<sup>2</sup>

The 6th August witnessed also the destruction of Battice. There, already on the 4th August, three inhabitants who had stopped to look at the troops were shot. Immediately after noon

<sup>1</sup> Report of the burgomaster of Warsage, M. Fléchet, and of another inhabitant (16<sup>e</sup> Rapport); G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 155 et seq.; diary of the German soldier W. Hiller, of the 2nd Regiment of Hussars, in Evidence and Documents, p. 249. *Wahrheit* is written for Warsage.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 28 et seq.

on the 6th, the Germans, repulsed in the morning by the fire of the forts, flowed back on the village. They began by slaughtering a young man who, in a café, was paying court to his fiancée. This was the signal for a massacre. The soldiers of the 165th Regiment pillaged, burned, and slaughtered. The beautiful village, burning like a torch upon the height, spread terror throughout the country. A dozen of the inhabitants were put to death in the evening, drawn up in a row in a meadow. The number of the victims is thirty-six. A few days later the pillage raged again, and the inhabitants, who had returned to search for such things as the fire might have spared, received orders to withdraw, if they did not wish to be put against a wall and shot.

At the moment when the fusillade resounded, the parish priest of Battice, M. G. Voisin, had, at the orders of the German commander, started for the hamlet of Bouxhmont, to invite the fugitives to return, with an assurance that they incurred no danger.

Nevertheless, the Germans maintained that he had unmasked a mitrailleuse and shot at the troops from the top of the tower of the church.<sup>1</sup>

The same day, also, the men who had survived the butchery at Fécher-Soumagne were led out, four at a time, to the number of 412, and conducted towards the forts of Liège, to serve as a shield for the troops. They passed the night at La Chartreuse. On the morning of the 7th August they were made to descend towards the town, and there were placed upon the bridges to prevent the Belgian artillery from destroying them. It appears that they were there until the following Tuesday. Then a part of them was released; the rest remained prisoners at La Chartreuse for more than a month.<sup>2</sup>

On the 7th August it was the turn of the village of Louveigné. That day the staff of the 57th, with a part of the 73rd, returned to Louveigné. The soldiers were furious about the losses encountered, on the previous day, before the forts. The drink-shops were pillaged, and many of the soldiers were drunk. Here and there shots were fired. A wounded uhlán was brought in, and the population was made responsible for his wound. Thereupon a dozen men were arrested. They were made to run along the road and were shot down.

Having supped copiously in the house of the parish priest, the officers took their host in a motor to show him how they were going to punish the village. At seven o'clock the central quarter of the commune was set on fire, whilst the inhabitants attempted to escape. The parish priest was taken to Theux, and ill-treated all the way. Twenty-nine inhabitants were killed. The others were compelled to bury the corpses on Sunday the 9th August. The burning of the houses continued for a fortnight; seventy-seven were sacrificed to the flames.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, *Vers Liège*, p. 54 et seq.; *Lettre du curé de Battice*, M. Voisin, Docteur en théologie de Louvain, in the Dutch newspaper *De Tijd*, 12th March 1915; see also the report of the same priest in *Réponse au Livre Blanc allemand*, pp. 110-16.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, op. cit. p. 134 et seq.; Evidence and Documents, depositions a5 and a9; 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 47 et seq.; diary of the German soldier Bruno Meyer (extract published in Evidence and Documents, p. 254); diary of the German soldier Schilling, of the Brunswick Hussars, No. 17 (*ibid.*, p. 255).



On Saturday the 8th August the rage of the invaders turned against Francorchamps and Herve. It was on receiving the news of the check before the forts that the Germans began to exercise their cruelty against the former village. About half-past eight a shot resounded, and was followed by two others and by a terrible fusillade. At this moment the inhabitants were distributing water and provisions to some artillery, cavalry, and infantry stationed at the four-cross road of the route to Malmédy. The soldiers immediately rushed to the village, and continued, without interruption, to fire upon the houses and the inhabitants, who took to flight dismayed. The villas and other dwellings were sacked and set on fire. Twelve persons were shot down, and three others seriously wounded.

The three shots which were the origin of the tragedy were not fired by civilians but by Belgian soldiers. In fact, until the middle of August small detachments of Belgian cavalry pushed forward their reconnoitring parties behind the German lines, with the assistance of woods, which are very numerous in the neighbourhood of Spa. On the 8th August, two gendarmes and two lancers were hidden in the copse of Francorchamps, and, perceiving the German column halting, fired on them. The Germans, having encountered no Belgian troops in these regions, immediately concluded that the civilians were guilty, and without a shade of hesitation proceeded to the general repression which we have described.<sup>1</sup>

At Hockay, a hamlet of Francorchamps, the Germans insisted that a shot was fired from the tower of the little church. They burned three houses and pillaged others. M. Cloes, who protested the innocence of his fellow-citizens, was killed. In the middle of the infamy the parish priest presented himself: "If you want a victim, let it be me!" He was dragged off to Tiège, and ill-treated on the way. There a soldier accused the priest of having fired. In spite of the intervention of several inhabitants he was shot.<sup>2</sup>

At Herve, incidents had taken place before the 8th August. On that day, in the morning, new troops, cavalry, infantry, and artillery, arrived by the Aix-la-Chapelle road. They had been excited by legends regarding the Belgian francs-tireurs, and were thirsty for vengeance. They invaded the town, firing in all directions and throwing incendiary grenades. They broke into the houses, dragging the inhabitants from them, leading away the men, and ranging the women and children, with their arms in the air, against the walls. After this the butchery began, and lasted during the whole of Saturday, simultaneously accompanied by incendiarism. At least thirty-nine inhabitants were killed. On Sunday the 9th the fires were still raging. The hôtel de ville was burned with all that it contained: papers, official registers, archives, and the banner of 1830. These were the exploits of the 39th Regiment of Infantry of the Reserve. The looting, burning, and carousing lasted until the 25th August: every time that fresh troops passed the scenes of horror were repeated. Since Herve had been punished, the soldiers drew the deduction that there had been francs-tireurs there: from thenceforth the town "belonged to them." More than three-

<sup>1</sup> E. Waxweiler, op. cit. pp. 270-1.

<sup>2</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 19 et seq.; letter from a witness in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 23rd July 1915.

hundred houses had been destroyed by the fire, and it was impossible to count fifty that had not been completely pillaged. The work of destruction attained incredible dimensions. Furniture, crockery, linen, pianos, departed for the frontier in loaded motors and loaded trucks. What could not be taken away was either broken or polluted with filth.<sup>1</sup>

The same day the Germans committed excesses at Dolhain also. This locality was sacked on the night of the 8th-9th August. Twenty-eight houses were burned, and several persons were killed by the soldiers, who compelled the people to leave their houses and then fired on them at random.<sup>2</sup> In the neighbourhood of Dolhain there were fusillades and incendiarism at Baelen, a frontier place. The regiment guilty of this excess came from the direction of Eupen. Among the killed was the Rev. Mackenzie, pastor of the Scotch church. He had stopped in this place with an English lady and her children who were coming from Germany, on account of the impossibility of continuing their journey. A mounted German officer directed the fusillades.<sup>3</sup>

The incidents at Baelen conclude the first series of the atrocities committed in the region of Liège.

As we have said, the second series began on the 12th August. On that day Cornesse, on the right bank of the Vesdre, was sacked. Early in the morning the troops which were in cantonments there, before departing, set on fire the presbytery, the communal school, and a farm; they shot the burgomaster and took away a great number of men. These they released after having several times threatened to shoot them and having carried out mock executions. The pretext for these excesses was that a German soldier had been wounded in the leg.<sup>4</sup>

On the 13th August came the turn of Heusay, Fléron, Saives, and Vivegnies. At Heusay the Germans contented themselves with pillaging the houses, befouling them, and giving themselves up to an orgie. The parish priest and his confrère of Magnée, who had taken refuge with him, were taken towards Fléron and imprisoned in the church with two hundred inhabitants; the Germans threatened to shoot them. The surrender of the fort of Fléron saved their lives.<sup>5</sup> We have already spoken of the events at Fléron itself. At Saives four civilians were killed and several houses burned.<sup>6</sup> At Vivegnies, in the afternoon of the 13th, the inhabitants were led into the fields whilst their houses were pillaged. A vast fire was lighted, and some sixty houses became the prey of the flames.<sup>7</sup>

Francorchamps was devastated a second time on the 14th August, by fresh troops coming from Germany. The unoccupied houses were set on fire, and the pillage recommenced.<sup>8</sup> The same day the invading

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 64 et seq.; Evidence and Documents, deposition a2. A shot was fired by a German non-commissioned officer, who afterwards called out to his soldiers: "Here they have fired." See E. Waxweiler, op. cit. p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*. Respecting the motive of the fusillade, see 10<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, p. 126)*.

<sup>3</sup> 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>4</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; Evidence and Documents, depositions a33 and a34.

<sup>5</sup> G. Somville, op. cit. p. 150 et seq.

<sup>6</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 217 et seq.

<sup>8</sup> G. Somville, op. cit. pp. 19-20.

army continued to defile through the streets of Barchon—a large number of artillery. The soldiers camped in a meadow. Towards nine o'clock a terrible fusillade resounded, shortly after the pillage of the cellars of the wine-merchant Garçon-Delsupesche. The soldiers spread about the village, driving the inhabitants from their houses. The men of the 85th Regiment operated in company with those of the 165th. The latter, who particularly distinguished themselves wheresoever they passed, killed people in their homes, on the road, and in the gardens. The inhabitants who took flight were held as prisoners near the factory and near the house of Colson, whence they witnessed the burning of the village. The list of victims includes twenty-nine names, of whom seven were women and four children. Ninety houses were burned. From the 15th to the 17th August six more inhabitants were killed; and the hamlet of Chefneux (twenty-two houses) was burned. During the night of the 14th–15th, some fifty men were made prisoners, with halters round their necks and their hands tied. Some were bound on the motor trolleys, others were compelled to follow the cannons at a run.<sup>1</sup>

On the 14th August the 26th German Regiment arrived at Oupeye. The soldiers looted the château of Grady, stole and broke the furniture and works of art. Some fifty inhabitants were led away on the road to Haccourt. They had to pass the night in the meadows. In the church everything was turned upside down: filth was to be seen before the confessionals, and the soldiers offered for sale the things which they had stolen.

On the 16th the soldiers of the 30th Regiment, who had arrived the preceding evening, burned eight houses, and indulged themselves at the expense of the inhabitants by mock executions. These outrages continued on the 17th.<sup>2</sup>

At Hermée, on the 14th August, in the afternoon, the parish priest and burgomaster were taken as hostages. A German major had them placed right and left of his horse, and ordered the inhabitants to be assembled. Of 1,200 inhabitants about 750 remained, the rest having taken flight after the massacre of the 5th and 6th August. The men were ranged on one side, the women and children on the other. An announcement was made to the unfortunates that German soldiers having been assassinated in the neighbourhood, the village was going to be burned. The priest succeeded in convincing the major that the soldiers who had lost their lives had been killed by shells from the fort of Pontisse, whence several shells had fallen in the village. The major made a show of a gesture of regret, but said: "There may have been a misunderstanding; but I have received an order, and I must execute it." The inhabitants were then led in the direction of Milmort, while the soldiers set the houses on fire. One hundred and nineteen houses were consumed by the flames. The presbytery was sacked, and the safe in it emptied. The chalice of the church was afterwards picked up on a highroad. The title-deeds of the church fabric and the archives were destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

The 15th August was a sinister day. On that day Visé was syste-

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 177 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> G. Somville, op. cit. p. 218 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225 et seq.; Evidence and Documents, deposition a35.

matically destroyed. The Germans had already at previous dates committed outrages in this town. On the 7th August they had destroyed the château of Navagne in order to use the materials derived thence for the construction of a bridge. The inhabitants were compelled to assist in the work. Two old men, the brothers Brouha, their sons and their son-in-law, were killed. On the 12th or the 13th the soldiers set the church on fire, under the pretext that it might serve as a guiding-mark for the fort of Pontisse. On the morning of the 15th August M. Duchêne, an old man of seventy-six, was shot, having been taken for the inn-keeper Michaux, who was accused of having fired at the soldiers. At five o'clock of the afternoon of that day a regiment of veritable Prussians, who had come from Koenigsberg, arrived. They quartered themselves on the inhabitants. About nine o'clock a shot was heard. "Man hat geschossen!" The soldiers immediately rushed upon the houses in a paroxysm of fury. The sack of the town raged in every direction.

The sub-officer Reinhold Koehn, of the 2nd battalion of Pioneers, 2nd Army Corps, in his diary, remarks on these incidents as follows: "In the night of the 15th-16th August, Pioneer Gr—— gave the alarm in the town of Visé. Every one was either shot or taken prisoner, and the houses were set on fire. The people taken prisoners were compelled to march to the military step."

We are ignorant how many inhabitants were killed. Six hundred were dragged away to Germany amidst violences, pretences of executions, blows, and spitting, and after a long journey arrived at the camp at Münster.

The burning of Visé was systematic, conducted by perfected appliances, benzine pumps, and incendiary grenades. Sub-officers directed the operations. Before the fire the officers chose all the objects of value and had them taken away, that they might themselves appropriate them.

With the exception of a small suburb, and a college which had served the invaders as an ambulance, everything was destroyed. The five or six hundred houses, the curious dwellings of olden times, the gothic church, the hôtel de ville of the fifteenth century, and the educational and charitable institutions—all perished.<sup>1</sup>

On the same day the Germans got to work also at Wandre and its neighbourhood, Hermalle, Heure-le-Romain, and Fexhe-Slins. At Wandre five men were shot at the Pré-Clusin. Eighteen were assembled in the street Bois-la-Dame. Thanks to the energetic protests of the parish priest, two of these men were released. In spite of the supplications of the women, the sixteen remaining men were gathered into a group, and whilst the priest was pronouncing absolution on the condemned, the Germans fired upon them *en masse*. The victims who were not killed on the spot were despatched with revolvers in the presence of the women and children. Again, on the 19th August eight other inhabitants of Wandre were massacred. Fire and pillage went

<sup>1</sup> 3<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête; 17<sup>e</sup> Rapport; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 205 et seq; diary of the German non-commissioned officer Reinhold Koehn, extract and photograph published in *Les violations des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne*, No. 62 (Ministère des Affaires étrangères de France); Evidence and Documents, deposition 216; evidence of the Dutch journalist L. Mokveld, in *Vrij België* (La Haye), 17th September 1915; *ibid.*, *De overweldiging van België*, Amsterdam, 1916.

and-in-hand with the butchery. Thirty-eight houses were systematically set on fire.

The soldiers guilty of these crimes, under the eternal pretext of "Man hat geschossen!" belonged to the 24th, 35th, and 53rd German Regiments.<sup>1</sup>

At Hermalle-sous-Argenteau, on the 15th August, about half-past seven, the Germans rushed into the quarter situated opposite the church, and drove out the parish priest, his assistant priest, and fourteen other inhabitants. They were placed before a firing party, and the soldiers made a show of preparations for a massacre. At half-past two in the morning the captives were driven to a bakehouse, where they found other prisoners already collected. During this time the soldiers pillaged and set on fire three houses. For three weeks the men between eighteen and sixty years of age had to pass the night in the church, being all the while exposed to incessant threats. Altogether ten houses were burned, and the whole commune handed over to pillage.<sup>2</sup>

At Heurle-le-Romain, new troops belonging to the 93rd Regiment arrived in the afternoon of the 15th August. The soldiers made perquisitions in the houses and drank to excess. About half-past ten in the evening shots were fired by the soldiers in the yard of a farm. On the morrow the greater part of the inhabitants were shut up in the church, where they remained until the 17th. A mitrailleuse was set in the porch of the church; opposite were placed four farm labourers, and the soldiers diverted themselves with pretences of an execution. In the meantime the houses were pillaged and the booty put upon wagons. The parish priest and the burgomaster, after many outrages, were led into a meadow and slaughtered. Five other inhabitants, among whom were two women, were shot.

The 93rd Regiment departed on Monday the 17th. Its work was finished by new troops. Everything was set on fire, and the soldiers gave themselves up to a veritable man hunt, firing upon the inhabitants who took flight. This time the number of victims was nineteen. About seventy houses became the prey of the flames. These outrages were committed by the 72nd (barred number) Regiment, and by another which is, perhaps, the 67th.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the Germans who camped at Fexhe-Slins during the night of the 15th-16th August killed, at the hamlet of Tilice, two miners and another workman, in the middle of the village.<sup>4</sup>

On the 16th August the village of Blégnny (Trembleur), which had previously suffered during the attack on Liège, encountered fresh horrors. This time it was the 64th Regiment that did the work. On the preceding night shots had been fired. The medical man of Blégnny, M. Reidemester, operated on a wounded soldier, and, having extracted the projectile, gave evidence that the bullet was a German one. This evidence was insistently placed before the officers who were present.

On the morning of the 16th the Germans placed against the wall

<sup>1</sup> G. Somville, op. cit. p. 197 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 211 et seq.; Evidence and Documents, deposition a15.

<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 234 et seq.; Evidence and Documents, deposition a17.

<sup>4</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête.

of the church four victims, amongst whom were the burgomaster and the parish priest. After this the church was set on fire.<sup>1</sup>

This same day the commune of Flémalle-Grande, near the fort of the same name, was invaded by a band of soldiers. These brutally drove the inhabitants from their houses, opened them, and pillaged the furniture. Afterwards, with the butts of their rifles, they put a great number of men, at least two hundred, against a wall at the hamlet of Profondeval and obliged them to remain motionless with their arms in the air. These men were informed that they were going to be shot in the fort at Flémalle did not surrender at noon. The fort, in point of fact, did surrender, and the prisoners were released. A score of houses were set on fire by means of incendiary grenades. Before this four men had been already shot near a café named "Campagne de Flémalle."

On the morning of the 16th M. Pirotte was killed by a sword-stroke at the moment when he was taking flight with his young wife and his child.<sup>2</sup>

The sinister series concluded at last with the sack of Haccourt opposite Visé. On the 18th August, about eight o'clock in the morning the Germans asserted that the old farmer Colson, of Hallembaye, a hamlet of Haccourt, had killed or wounded a German horse. Refusing to institute any inquiry, the soldiers set fire to the farm, in which perished, burned to death, the farmer, his son, and his daughter-in-law. Afterwards the soldiers set Hallembaye on fire, destroying eighty-four houses. At the same time another band invaded Haccourt itself, and there killed seventeen persons, of whom five were women and three children of fifteen years of age. The priest of the parish, M. Thielen was struck down by a ball in the nape of the neck, and afterwards despatched by a bayonet wound in the region of the heart. As for the retired priest, the Abbé Hauf, who was ill and bedridden, he was dragged out of his burning house, rolled in a coverlet, and from the ground-floor window thrown into the public street. The old man some days afterwards, died of the shock.

To conclude, 112 inhabitants were taken prisoners into Germany.<sup>3</sup>

It is time to conclude these relations of horrors. The incidents recurred with so great a regularity that their relation produces an inevitable impression of monotony. This, however, is exactly what constitutes their value. We perceive, thus, system. These atrocities were committed in accordance with rules, in accordance with a plan established in advance, with an intention perfectly clear and deliberate.<sup>4</sup> Later we shall return to the question of the system itself: here it may suffice to have narrated the facts in connection with the events of a military kind which were developing at Liège.

The German soldier Hans Wix, of the 78th Regiment of Infantry Reserve (Xth Corps of Reserve), writing with a lead pencil in his diary

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 185 et seq. Evidence and Documents, depositions a7 and a20; A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, pp. 15-16; *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 11th August 1915.

<sup>2</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête; Evidence and Documents, depositions a19 and a21.

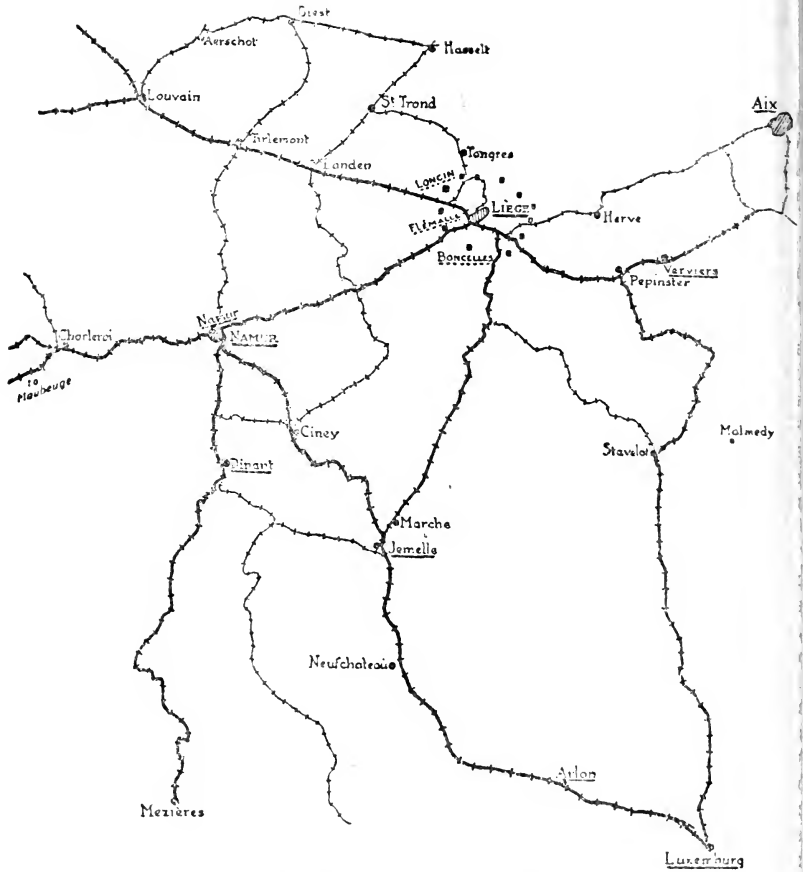
<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête; G. Somville, op. cit. p. 222 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> See the study by H. Davignon, *Les procédés de guerre des Allemands en Belgique*, loc. cit.

is reflections on the outrages perpetrated by his compatriots, confesses with melancholy: "Es ist doch was daran an dem Gerede von den deutschen Barbaren!"<sup>1</sup> ("There is then some truth, after all, in what is said about Germans being barbarians!")

This is what suggested to us the title of the present chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Extract and photograph in *Les violations des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne*, p. 80. A list, still incomplete, drawn up by M. Somville after an inquiry on the spot, gives the names of about eighty victims of the female sex who were killed, the greater part on the 5th and 6th August, in the vicinity of Liège. See his article "Tueurs de femmes" in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 9th November 1915. The names and ages of the victims are recorded.



HOW LIÈGE COMMANDS RAILWAY COMMUNICATIONS.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESISTANCE OF LIÈGE

WHAT were, from the point of view of the ulterior military operations, the consequences of the resistance of Liège? In giving an answer to this question it will be necessary not to be carried away by sentiment, and to examine the problem by the light of a calm study of the facts.

It is essential to lay stress upon the fact that the capture of the city of Liège gave the Germans no important strategic advantage so long as the forts continued to hold out. We have sufficiently demonstrated this above.

On the other hand, the heroic resistance of the 3rd Division of the army and of the 15th mixed brigade seriously impaired the value of the three army corps which had rushed to the assault of the forts and the connecting works. They had to reorganize themselves, and their inactivity between the 7th and 16th August is the best proof of the fact. Besides, in conformity with the programme of the Belgian Staff, the resistance of the troops at Liège permitted the other divisions of the Belgian army to concentrate in good time on the line of the Gette.

It was the resistance of the forts that principally completely hindered the advance of the enemy. Without doubt the troops of General Von Kluck (the 1st Army) began to debouch upon the left bank of the Meuse, by the gap between the Dutch frontier and Liège, and principally by the passage of Lixhe and that of Visé.<sup>1</sup> The fire of the fort of Pontisse somewhat inconvenienced these operations by destroying the pontoons fixed for the crossing of the river. In particular the fort of Loncin placed an obstacle in the way of the course of invasion. This fort blocked the access to the central plains of Belgium, and forbade access to the principal lines of railway in the direction of France. The Germans were able to throw their army corps rapidly from Aix to Liège: but there they were stopped and obliged to mark time.<sup>2</sup>

To the south of Liège the 2nd German Army, under the command of Von Bülow,<sup>3</sup> coming probably from the direction of Malmédy, entered Belgium on the 9th August,<sup>4</sup> and marched upon Namur by the valley of the Meuse. On the 12th August it got astride of the Liège-Namur railway, and obtained possession of Huy.<sup>5</sup> But the possession

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. i. pp. 106-8, 152-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>4</sup> On this day is dated Von Bülow's proclamation, addressed to the Belgian nation from the headquarters of Montjoie. See the text of this proclamation in *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. pp. 78-9.

<sup>5</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* p. 153; E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, pp. 61-2.

of the section Huy-Namur was of no help to it so long as the section Huy-Liège was rendered unavailable by the resistance of the forts of Boncelles and Flémalle, and especially of Loncin.<sup>1</sup> Finally, in Belgian Luxemburg the Saxon army of Von Hausen, and that of Duke Albert of Würtemberg were advancing, the former fixing its headquarters at Marche, the latter at Neufchâteau.<sup>2</sup> The army of Von Hausen was intended to force the passage of the Meuse at Dinant in such a way as to encircle Namur, and to block the eventual line of retreat of the garrison. The two armies, however, had also as their objective to seize the railways from Verviers to Luxemburg, from Liège to Jemelle, and especially the line Namur-Arlon-Luxemburg.<sup>3</sup> Once more, without the point of junction at Liège, the possession of these lines was of no great value to them.<sup>4</sup>

The events proved it. Although these armies encountered no serious resistance, their progress was slow; the transport of artillery and supplies was effected with difficulty on the roads of the Ardennes.<sup>5</sup> Dinant was not attacked for the first time until the 15th August, and the direct and really important operations against Namur did not begin until the 19th August.<sup>6</sup>

So the resistance of the forts of Liège considerably crippled the progress of the invasion. It was especially the action of the fort of Loncin that compelled the forces of Von Kluck to suspend their advance against the Belgian army posted on the Gette, and consequently their southernly march on France.

The fort fell on the 15th August. It was not until the 18th August that the army of Von Kluck came into contact with the troops of King Albert.<sup>7</sup> The fall of Loncin opened for the enemy access to the principal railways running from Ans, south-west towards Namur and France, and north-west towards Brussels and Antwerp. It may be affirmed that the action of Loncin retarded the principal advance by at least a week.<sup>8</sup>

The invaders had expected to pass rapidly across Belgium and to fall upon France like a thunderbolt. Far from accomplishing this, the irruption marked time for a dozen days on the banks of the Meuse.

If we regard the consequences of the resistance of Liège from the point of view of the action of the armies of the Allies, we may affirm that it permitted the British Expeditionary Force to collect, to disembark at Boulogne, and to concentrate in the rear of Maubeuge from the 14th August.<sup>9</sup>

It also permitted the French Staff to introduce some important changes in its scheme of concentration.<sup>10</sup> Before the 4th August the French armies were drawn up facing Germany, with a north-easterly direction. Belgian neutrality having been violated, the 5th French Army crept towards the north-west along the Belgian frontier as far as

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>3</sup> E. Dane, op. cit. p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. pp. 164-5.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41.

<sup>8</sup> This is the opinion of J. Buchan, op. cit. p. 159, and of the military critic of *The Times* ("A Year of War by Land" in *The Times* of the 5th August 1915).

<sup>9</sup> E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, p. 48; Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 119 (annexe).

<sup>10</sup> See the Report of the French Staff in the Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 119 (annexe).

the locality of Fourmies. In addition, two corps of the 2nd Army (the 18th and the 19th), as well as two divisions from Algiers and Morocco, were transported towards Mézières and Hirson. Finally, General Sordet's cavalry corps received orders to penetrate into Belgium to reconnoitre the German columns and to obstruct their movements. This advance was made on the 6th August, whilst the Germans were still checked at Liège.

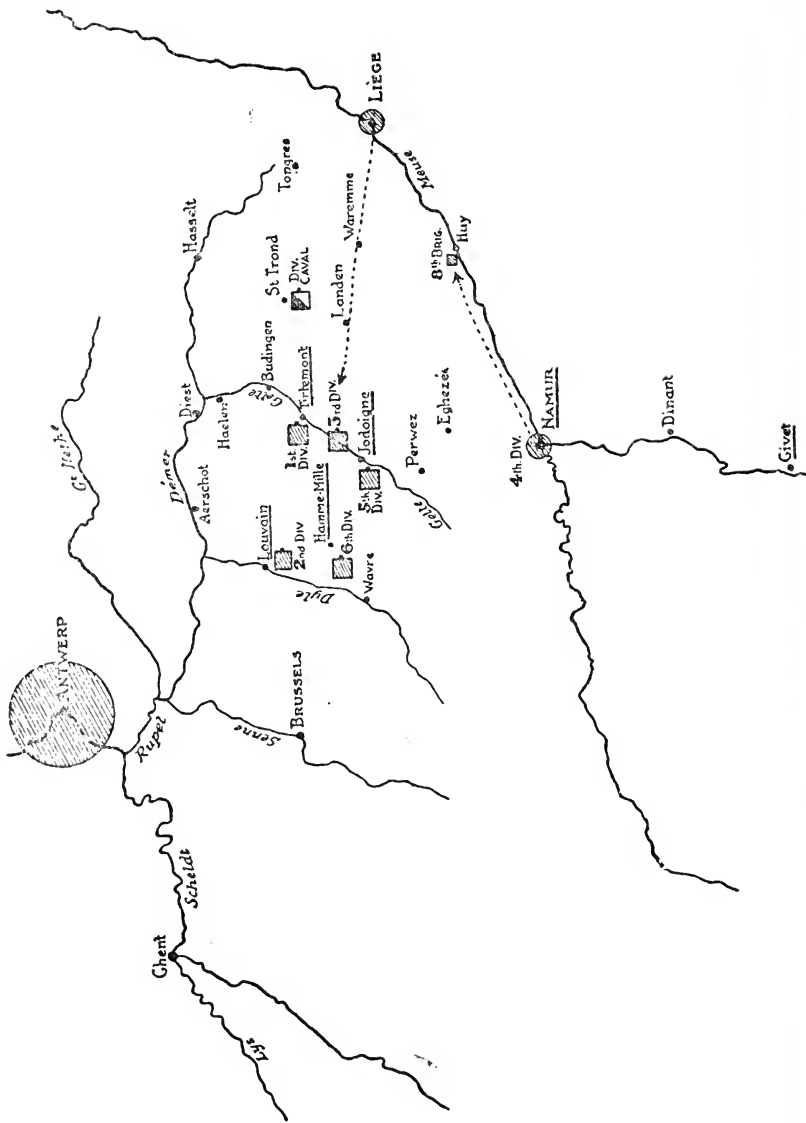
But the resistance of Liège had not only consequences of a strategic kind. It also had immense moral importance. It destroyed the legend of the invincibility of German troops. A great military nation, intoxicated with its power, had seen itself ignominiously stopped at the gates of a small nation unprepared for a war of this kind.

As an English military critic says: "The triumph was moral—an advertisement to the world that the old simple faiths of country and duty could still nerve the arm for battle, and that the German idol, for all its splendour, had feet of clay."<sup>1</sup>

Thence came the wave of enthusiasm which passed over the world at the first news of the Belgian resistance.

And so, on the 7th August, in memory of the fight which had been waged under its walls, the President of the Republic decorated the city of Liège with the cross of the Legion of Honour, and on the 9th August conferred on King Albert the military medal, the highest honour which a general officer can receive in France.

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* p. 105.



THE POSITIONS OF THE BELGIAN ARMY ON THE GETTE.

## CHAPTER X

### THE BELGIAN ARMY IN POSITION OF OBSERVATION ON THE GETTE

At the moment when, on the 6th August, under the shelter of the forces defending Liège, the Belgian army had completed its concentration on the quadrilateral Tirlemont-Louvain-Wavre-Perwez, the situation was as follows. The 3rd Division was in retreat towards the main body of the army. The enemy had crossed the Meuse to the north of Visé; he had attacked the position at Liège with three army corps; other corps were gathering to the east and south-east of this place. The total of these troops constituted forces by far superior to those which the Belgians could oppose to them.<sup>1</sup>

The Belgian military authorities had resolved during the campaign to act upon the following rules. In all cases when the army should have before it very superior forces it would maintain itself as far advanced as possible in good defensive positions, barring the way of the invader in such a manner as to withhold from invasion as great a part as possible of Belgian territory. Thus situated as a vanguard of the French and English armies, it would wait in these positions until the eventual juncture with these armies could be effected. If, however, this juncture had not been effected at the moment of the arrival of the enemy's masses, the Belgian troops should not be exposed to certain loss, which would inevitably entail the occupation of the territory.

With this aim, the army would not alone engage against the enemy's masses; it would not permit itself to be enveloped, but would act in such a manner as to reserve a line of retreat, allowing of an ulterior junction and united action with the French and English armies.<sup>2</sup>

In consequence of this plan of action the Belgian troops took position on the Gette. Behind Liège this was the first line of natural defence: the line being also prolonged by the course of the Meuse between Namur and Givet, and resting on the left on the Démer.

It thus protected a great part of the Belgian territory, and barred the road towards central Belgium against the German offensive, which began to take form.

At the same time the Belgian army had not effectives sufficient to occupy the whole of the line thus traced across the territory: it could hold only the Gette and Namur, in the hope that the armies of the nations who were Belgium's guarantors would come to occupy the ground between the Gette and Namur, and the line of the Meuse between Namur and Givet.

The position on the Gette offered numerous advantages. It covered

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Brussels, the capital; it prevented any threat of isolating the army of Antwerp. This latter city constituted, in fact, the base of operations, where all the resources, whether provisions, ammunition, or commissariat, were concentrated, and whither, in case of danger, the Government would transfer its seat.

The following was the disposition of the forces on the Gette. The left of the army was to the north-west of Tirlemont, the right at Jodoigne. In the first line were the 1st and the 5th Divisions of the army, between which, after the 8th August, the 3rd Division, retired from Liège, was inserted. In the second line were at Louvain the 2nd Division, and at Hamme-Mille the 6th Division. These forces were covered by a division of cavalry which from Waremme had fallen back on St.-Trond. It rested upon the advanced guards of the first line, and reconnoitred towards Visé, Liège, and Hasselt.

The 4th Division remained in position at Namur, to defend this place, and at the same time to serve as a *point d'appui* of the Gette-Meuse front. The 8th mixed brigade, belonging to the forces of Namur, was detached at Huy.

The position of observation on the Gette, as we have just described it, was held by the main body of the troops without any important change until the 18th August, the day when the masses of Von Kluck came into contact with the Belgians.<sup>1</sup>

From the 6th until the 18th the operations of the enemy were limited to sending divisions of cavalry on scouting expeditions to the west of the Meuse, in the part of the country between Liège and the Belgian front on the Gette, as well as in the direction of Namur.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of these movements was to veil with a thick curtain the operations of the concentration of the mass of the German troops, around Liège itself and on the north of Visé, to make reconnaissances that might sound the strength of the Belgian troops, and to obtain information concerning the arrival and the actual presence of French and British troops. On the 9th August and the days next following numerous squadrons of cavalry had crossed the Meuse at Lixhe and at Visé, and by improvised bridges established at various places between Liège and Maestricht.<sup>3</sup>

Afterwards that part of the country which extended before the Belgian front was overrun in every direction by groups of cavalry, for the most part uhlans and hussars, often preceded by scouts in motors, supported by detachments of *Jäger* (chasseurs), and sometimes by light artillery.<sup>4</sup> This curtain of cavalry extended approximately from Hasselt to Waremme, passing by St.-Trond.

So from the date of the 8th August a period of extreme hardship began for the Belgian army. It had, at all costs, to try to discern the enemy's projects, and to avoid all surprises. De Witte's division of cavalry continued without respite to send out its patrols and reconnaissances into contact with the enemy; whilst, on their side, the

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 17-19; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 19; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>3</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. pp. 153-4.

<sup>4</sup> E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, pp. 58-60, 63-4; J. Buchan, op. cit. p. 153; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 33-4.

divisions of the army established on the first line showed a great vigilance, having posts on all the roads of approach, and holding their forces continuously ready to intervene at the first sign of danger.

Such a service imposed on the troops perpetual hardships—hardships the more laborious as, in this month of August, the heat was torrid, and particularly oppressive for the Belgian soldiers in their dark uniforms and heavy shakos. In addition, as the days passed, the menace, at first indefinite and vague, continuously increased, creating an atmosphere of disquiet and nervousness.

The immobility of the enemy was a source of astonishment. His prudence seemed to conceal some mysterious design. What was he preparing behind the curtain of cavalry that was flooding the country? In vain the Belgian squadrons put to flight all these patrols of uhlans. They always reappeared. In the same manner the advanced posts dispersed, by rifle fire, the enemy scouts; but others appeared at all hours of the day and night. Living constantly under the apprehension of an imminent attack, the Belgian troops rarely enjoyed any rest. In the distance, from time to time, the rumbling sound of the cannonade around the forts of Liège was audible; while the absence of any precise intelligence created moments of cruel anxiety. At night, at the advanced posts, the men, with all their nerves strained, exerted themselves more eagerly to pierce the mystery of the darkness. Isolated shots, suddenly breaking the profound silence, made them shudder. They had not as yet acquired that mastery of themselves which permits veteran troops to sleep with their fists clenched for the fight.<sup>1</sup>

It was, consequently, with a feeling of relief that the Belgians occasionally engaged in combat with unimportant bodies of the enemy's cavalry. There were skirmishes of this kind at Tongres, Hasselt,<sup>2</sup> Orsmael-Gudsenhoven. The affair at Orsmael took place on the 10th August. A strong column of cavalry, supported by chasseurs and artillery, or by machine guns (they perhaps numbered altogether 2,000 men) advanced by Landen in the direction of Tirlemont. At Orsmael they found themselves confronted by Belgian lancers, who tried to dispute their passing. In the course of the very sharp action which followed, Captain-Commandant Knapen, Lieutenants Halleux and Count Van der Burch, and a score of cavalry were killed.<sup>3</sup> The rest retreated. The Germans then advanced in the direction of Tirlemont. At Bost, about a mile from the town, they fell in with the Belgian infantry, defending the approaches to the Gette. The enemy's column thereupon retired, one part taking the direction of St.-Trond, another that of Waremmé. The Belgians pursued them and caused them serious losses.<sup>4</sup>

We do not know how much we should accept of certain assertions respecting the death of Commandant Knapen during the

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 2nd October 1915.

<sup>2</sup> E. Dane, op. cit. pp. 60-1; J. Buchan, op. cit. p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 34, n. 1; E. Dane, op. cit. p. 62; J. M. Kennedy, *The Campaign round Liège*, pp. 82-3.

<sup>4</sup> E. Dane, op. cit., loc. cit.; J. M. Kennedy, op. cit., loc. cit.

combat at Orsmael. This, however, is certain : that the Germans were guilty of cruelty to the lancers who remained stretched on the field of battle. Quartermaster B. Van de Kerchove, of the 3rd Lancers, although he had two bullet wounds, was maltreated. His carbine was snatched from his hands, and a German soldier gave him with it a formidable blow on the loins. Then another aimed at him from a distance of only a couple of yards, and fired at him, but merely scratched his belly.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the same engagement a cyclist carabinieri fell into the hands of the Germans, who hanged him on a hedge.<sup>2</sup>

It is also asserted that these detachments of enemy's scouts and their cavalry forces were guilty of worse outrages, and that soon the name of uhlan became synonymous with that of a bandit, and made the people of the villages that had witnessed the exploits of these horsemen shudder with alarm.

The system of terrorization inaugurated at Liège continued. It was specially practised by isolated groups of cavalry, who arrived suddenly in the villages, seized hostages, and requisitioned provisions. These horsemen lived on the country; even columns of large numbers were without commissariat trains.<sup>3</sup> The requisitions were accompanied by menaces and violence.

The atrocities committed during this period were often acts of isolated horsemen; but some assumed the aspect of a collective punishment, inflicted on account of a suspicion that the people in the region were francs-tireurs. It is not always possible to accuse the authors of these reprisals of complete bad faith. Their imaginations were haunted by stories of francs-tireurs, and the daily losses which they suffered in the course of their expeditions must sometimes have confirmed them in their mistake. The engagements were not on all occasions regular combats such as that at Orsmael. The tactics of the Belgian scouts often consisted in preparing ambushes and harassing the enemy. Many patrols were concealed in the villages through which the enemy would have to pass; they fired on him, and afterwards withdrew to the main body of their regiment. These tactics made the enemy nervous, bewildered him, and caused him to attribute the shooting to the inhabitants of the villages where an attack had been made.<sup>4</sup>

These remarks are very clearly illustrated by what occurred at Linsmeau, near Tirlemont, on the 10th August. On that day a German detachment entered the village. It found some peasants assembled around a grave recently dug; some of them still had spades in their hands. By their side was the corpse of a German officer. The corpse was examined. The forehead had been pierced by a bullet from a revolver; and the wound was not such a one as would have been received in combat. The objects of value belonging to the deceased had disappeared. There could be no doubt that the peasants had killed and robbed the officer, and they had been caught in the midst of their sinister proceedings. "Punish the village!" exclaimed the

<sup>1</sup> 7<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique, p. 94).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> E. Waxweiler, op. cit. pp. 219-20.



commanding officer. Eight farms were burned; the village was pillaged; the women suffered violence; the men were bound in cords, taken into a meadow, and threatened with death. Fourteen persons were shot, and despatched by smashing their skulls with rifle-butts. Among them were the peasant grave-diggers. The Germans buried the bodies, and departed convinced that they had executed justice for the murder of their comrade.

No act, however, of francs-tireurs had taken place at Linsmeau. Early in the morning some Belgian soldiers had encountered on the highroad German soldiers making a reconnaissance. Shots were exchanged. The Germans fled, leaving on the ground a wounded German officer. The Belgians surrounded him. Suddenly, foaming with rage, the German raised himself and threatened them with his revolver. One of the Belgians fired and hit the forehead of the officer, who fell dead. Touched by what had occurred, the Belgians gathered together the things belonging to the dead man, knotted them in a handkerchief, and took them to the parish priest, saying, "When the Germans pass again, hand this to their officer, and ask him to forward the contents to the family of a man who is dead over there." They then assembled the peasants and asked them to dig a grave and bury the corpse. Whilst the soldiers were returning to the Belgian lines the peasants set to work. It was at this moment that the German detachment arrived and that the scene of "punishment" which we have described took place.<sup>1</sup>

This war of ambushes, of scouts, and of isolated Belgian posts caused the flying columns which were scouting numerous losses. They revenged themselves, as at Linsmeau, by inflicting reprisals upon the village populations. On the night of the 10th August they entered Velm.<sup>2</sup> The inhabitants were asleep. One after another the soldiers fired on the house of Deglimme, made their way into it by force, pillaged, and set fire to the barns and stables. The farmer's wife, with scarcely any clothes on, was seized and carried off to a place two leagues distant. When set at liberty she took flight, and was fired upon. The same lot befell her husband.

The diary of the German soldier Stephan Luther has preserved recollections of this period of terrorization. This soldier belonged to the horse artillery, and probably formed part of one of these columns which were manœuvring between Liège and the Gette towards the middle of August. He notes under the date of the 10th August: "We advanced by way of Landen and traversed several villages which showed friendly dispositions. One of them was bombarded by mistake. After several other errors (of this kind) we bivouacked temporarily on a hill behind the village. In the village situated below us, some sad scenes! There was naturally a good deal of misunderstanding because the officers do not understand French. There was a terrible destruction: in a farm was a woman who had been stripped completely naked, and whose body was

<sup>1</sup> See E. Waxweiler, op. cit. pp. 256-8; *Official Communication of the Belgian Government*, made on the 25th April 1915. The text will be found in J. M. Kennedy, *The Campaign round Liège*, p. 143 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Respecting these incidents see the *Official Communication of the Belgian Government*, quoted in the preceding note.

stretched on carbonized posts. No doubt there were reasons for this procedure,<sup>1</sup> but how savage this is."<sup>2</sup>

The activity of the enemy's cavalry soon extended towards Hasselt and Diest, whence they threatened to turn the left flank of the army posted on the Gette. The division of Belgian cavalry immediately moved from St.-Trond towards Budingen and Haelen, where it lengthened the left of the Belgian positions. It was in the latter place that on the 12th August a really important action on both sides took place, one which presaged the danger to which the Belgian troops were soon to be exposed. The combat at Haelen deserves a chapter apart.

<sup>1</sup> This remark, one stereotyped in all these diaries, contrasts singularly with what has preceded.

<sup>2</sup> See the original German text in Evidence and Documents, p. 253. *Laden* stands for *Landen*.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE COMBAT OF HAELEN<sup>1</sup>

12th August 1914

On the 12th August the division of cavalry covered the left of the Belgian army, drawn up along the Gette from the vicinity of Jodoigne to the vicinity of Tirlemont. The duty of the division was to guard the left bank of the river on the front Budingen-Haelen.

On that day the German cavalry attempted to force the passage of the Gette. The previous day important bodies of hostile cavalry, reinforced by artillery and by infantry, had been observed on the march from St.-Trond and its neighbourhood towards Hasselt and Diest. Reconnaissances of Belgian cavalry had been sent some distance towards the routes followed by these troops, and their reports had made it possible to determine the presumed objective of the enemy—an attempt to turn the left wing of the army.

In consequence, General de Witte, commanding the division of cavalry, had taken his measures to repel the attack, and on the morning of the 12th all the points of the passage of the Gette were held, at Diest, at Haelen, at Geet-Betz, and at Budingen.

The most vulnerable and most dangerous point of this line was Haelen. The highroad from Hasselt to Diest passes through this village, and the populous part of the village is entirely situated on the left bank of the Gette. If the enemy succeeded in making himself master of it, and of holding the outlets, he would find himself in a position to outflank, by Loxbergen and Waenrode, the left flank of the Belgian army and seriously to threaten its communications.

General de Witte, however, decided not to use Haelen otherwise than as an outpost, and to concentrate the greater part of his forces behind the village, on a front extending from Zelck to Velpen. Zelck on the road to Diest, Velpen on the road to Loxbergen, and the hamlet of Liebroeck could form so many *points d'appui* of a line of resistance which would be defended by the battalion of cyclists and by dismounted cavalry in case the advanced position of Haelen happened to be taken.

The latter position was defended by the 3rd company of cyclists. These valiant soldiers, whom the Germans named "die schwarze Teufel" (the black devils), had held Haelen since the 10th August.

<sup>1</sup> We have consulted : (1) Narrative of the *Combat de Haelen*, published in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 12 January 1915, under the initials A. P. F.; (2) Commandant W. Breton, *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, pp. 9-16 (*Pages d'histoire*, 1914-15, No. 71); (3) *L'Action de l'armée belge* (official report), pp. 19-21; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 34-8.

On the 11th they opened fire on a strong patrol of hostile cavalry coming from Herck-la-Ville and had repulsed them with losses.

Towards eight o'clock in the morning cavalry patrols appeared on the highroad of Hasselt. They approached Haelen. A demi-squadron followed them. This was the enemy's vanguard, which came to fee the approaches to the village. A copious fusillade rattled out: the cyclist carabiniers received the group of cavalry with a sharp fire. The cavalry turned away, leaving dead and wounded on the ground. Leaping from their shelters, the cyclists hastened to make prisoners of the dismounted cavalry, who had rolled to the ground in front of the barricades.

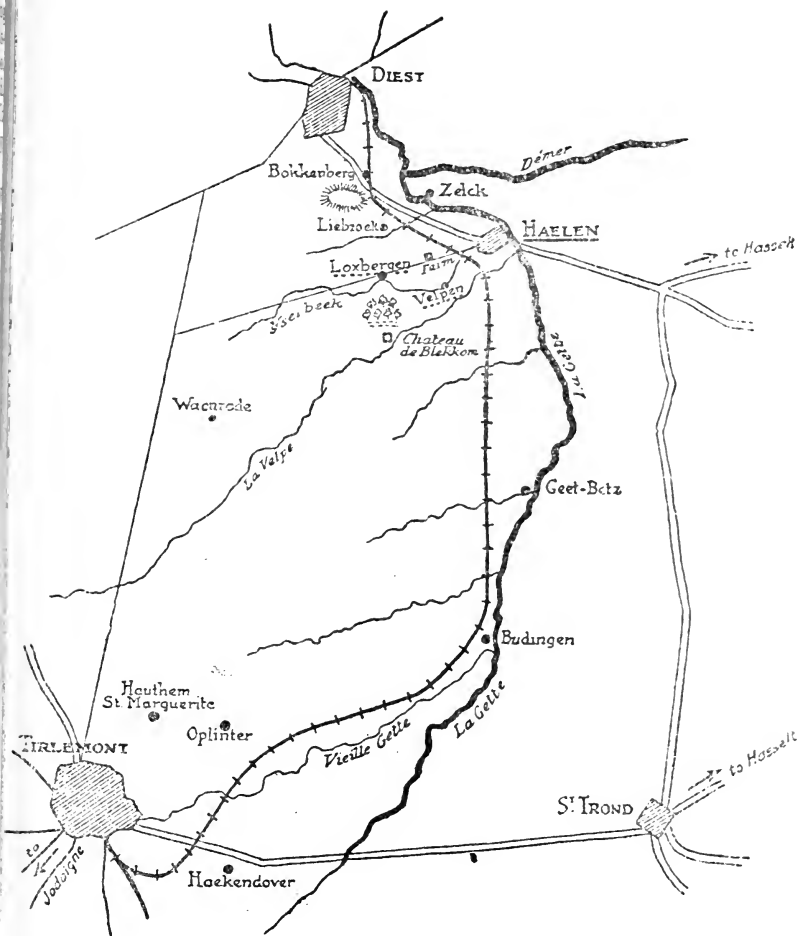
This action was but a prelude. Half an hour of calm ensued. About half-past eight the attack developed itself in violent form. It was conducted by a number of dismounted cavalry, supported by chasseurs.

Profiting by the resistance shown by the cyclists (on whose tenacity he could count) General de Witte, now assured of the intentions of the enemy, rapidly organized his principal positions of defence behind Haelen.

He ordered his brigade of lancers to organize Loxbergen (the wood to the south of the village), as well as the farm of Yserebeek. On the left wing of this position he threw two squadrons of guides into Velper to defend this locality on foot. The right wing at Zelck was held by the cyclists and the lancers. Not far from the farm of Yserebeek a mounted battery was disposed in such a manner as to hold under its fire the outlets of Haelen. Two other batteries were posted in reserve to the west of the hamlet of Liebroeck. In the rear, in the direction of the château of Blekkom, a cavalry reserve stood ready to intervene at any point where the line should be pierced.

Meanwhile the German attack on Haelen was pressed vigorously. For nearly two hours the 3rd company of cyclists valiantly held out against all assaults. Towards ten o'clock it was reinforced by the 1st company and by the section of machine guns summoned from Loxbergen. These placed themselves on the southern skirts of Haelen. All the efforts of the enemy to turn the defence failed. Nothing was left to him but to try to pierce his way directly by the highroad from Hasselt to Diest. The German artillery came up at a gallop, about ten o'clock, opposite Haelen, whilst an attack, more furious than those which had preceded it, obtained at last the mastery over the resistance of the troops defending the approach to the village. These, compelled to retreat, blew up the bridge by which the highroad crosses the Gette. A heavy fire had already rendered the outskirts of Haelen untenable; now the shells were falling upon the village itself, reducing to a mass of ruins the houses nearer the bridge. Under a hail of fire the cyclist company withdrew, evacuated Haelen, and fell back on the Diest-Tirlemont railway. There it was supported by the machine guns of the 1st company.

The Germans rapidly crossed the village, and presented themselves at its exit, hastening to deploy in front of the railway. At this moment the mounted battery placed near the Yserebeek farm came into action and showered projectiles on the outlets of Haelen. Each reinforcement that emerged from the village was cannonaded, and in a short time the corpses of the Germans strewed the ground. Nevertheless, little by



COMBAT OF HAELEN, 12TH AUGUST 1914.

little the effort of the enemy progressed; and his thrust opened the way for further forces. At midday the road from Haelen to Diest was cleared. A German squadron descended at a gallop by the paved road in the direction of Zelck, which it perhaps supposed to be unoccupied or which it thought possible to take by an audacious stroke. The cavalry dashing on the village were suddenly arrested in their course by the fire of the two platoons of cyclists and the cavalry of the 4th Lancers, and were almost decimated.

During this *coup de main* on the highroad the station of Haelen was violently attacked, but the Germans fell, mown down by the artillery and the four Belgian machine guns. Nevertheless the diversion towards Zelck had permitted the enemy to deploy his lines and to extend his attack towards the north. The cyclists who were defending the railway were about to be outflanked. Slowly they fell back towards the farm of Yserebeek, where they met with the support of the lines prepared by the dismounted cavalry of the 4th and 5th Lancers.

On the whole front Liebroeck-Velpen a terrible struggle continued; cavalry and cyclists rivalled each other in ardour, and their murderous fire arrested any appreciable advance of the enemy. The German marksmen exhausted themselves in fruitless efforts, and the assailants prepared to try to break the Belgian lines by cavalry charges.

Before the part of the front held by the carabinieri to the north of the farm of Yserebeek a squadron of dragoons welled up, deployed, and came on at full charge. The Belgians, who had been fighting for nearly five hours, at first exhibited a slight backward movement, but quickly recovered themselves. The cyclists, whilst permitting the charge to approach, got their rifles ready and then suddenly fired at short distance. The lancers appeared on the flank and attacked the enemy at an angle, while the machine guns unrolled in regular movement their ribbon of projectiles. In a few instants the hostile dragoons had disappeared, mown down. Only maddened horses continued the charge, scattering and wheeling round to fall heavily before the Belgian lines.

But already a second squadron was arriving, profiting by the first charge to gain ground. These came at the trenches at full gallop. The fire of the Belgians beat down the first ranks. Against this barrier of men and horses the following ranks broke, tossing like waves and sinking into an inextricable mass. The second squadron had ceased to exist.

In this part of the front there was no possibility of piercing through. Two squadrons had been annihilated. The two that remained will be flung by the enemy against the southern part of the lines, where the lancers will receive the shock.

The deluge of cavalry arrive, the two squadrons charging together to intensify the effect of their mass—a furious rush of horses excited by the hoarse cries of their riders, that comes down under the crackling of the fusillade and the roar of the cannons. Once more the charge breaks up, almost all the riders roll on the ground, whilst their mounts, maddened and bleeding, continue their course and cross the lines in a disorderly gallop, to fall at a distance behind them.

Abandoning these furious shock attacks, which had cost them so many dead, the Germans renew the contest by fire, in a progress slow but certain.

They throw their reserves into the scale, deploying on a front of

500 metres between Velpen and Liebroeck, and bringing their artillery to the left bank of the Gette, through Haelen, which was in flames. These guns effectively combated the Belgian pieces, and inundated the trenches with projectiles. Everywhere the lines of riflemen advanced, supported by a number of machine guns.

Under this hellish fire, and the obstinate thrust of the enemy's troops, the Belgians, manifestly inferior in numbers and having suffered considerable losses, weaken. They abandon Liebroeck and Velpen, which the enemy occupy. From these two points a convergent fire riddles the farm of Yserebeek, situated in the middle of the line. This position becomes untenable, and is evacuated. The situation is critical: all the *points d'appui* are taken, the front of the Gette is about to be pierced, if reinforcements do not arrive.

Suddenly between two and three o'clock, the first elements of the 4th mixed brigade debouch, from the side of Loxbergen, on the battlefield.

Advised, about seven in the morning, of the march of the enemy on Haelen, the military chief authorities had ordered the 1st Division to direct the 4th mixed brigade—4th and 24th of the Line and also a group of three batteries—to go to the assistance of the division of cavalry.

This brigade was quartered at Hauthem-Ste.-Marguerite. Leaving a battalion to guard the cantonment at Haekendover, a company as an outpost at Oplinter, and a platoon at Hauthem-Ste.-Marguerite, the brigade set out about 9.45. Whilst it was on its way an order of the commander of the division of cavalry caused it to detach successively two companies, one at Budingen and one at Geet-Betz. At the moment of its intervention on the field of battle the brigade had consequently only four battalions and a company.

The heat was overwhelming. The distance to be traversed amounted to more than 20 kilometres, half the time on sandy roads, where the soldiers sank up to their ankles. But time pressed. In the distance the guns roared without cessation, speaking to the soldiers of the desperate efforts of their comrades. Horsemen arrived at full gallop to meet the column, praying them to hasten their march. And under the midday sun, in the blinding dust, streaming with sweat, half-dead with thirst, oppressed by the weight of rifle and haversack, the brave infantry braced themselves and hastened their steps, burning to join their comrades who were fighting there in the distance, anxiously awaiting their arrival.

Towards noon, a horseman quite gray with dust appeared on the horizon, approached, and passed a brief order to the commandant of the column. The mounted batteries of the cavalry division had need of being reinforced immediately. Immediately the group of cannons of the brigade quickened their pace: the powerful trot of their Ardennes horses carried the three batteries ahead; they passed the head of the column, and disappeared down the road amid the rattle of their guns and of the dancing caissons. They were soon at Loxbergen, and placed themselves immediately in position, the 7th and the 8th batteries at the mill of Loxbergen, and the 9th on the northern edge of the village. Their fire, united with that of the mounted group, engaged the enemy's artillery and bombarded Haelen, inflicting serious

losses on the troops which occupied that locality. Several cavalry charges and tentative attacks were arrested.

Still the obstinacy of the Germans brought them, at a certain moment, to within hardly 1,000 metres of the guns. There their line broke.

Nevertheless, this help would not have been able to save the situation without the arrival of the infantry. At last, at 1.40, the battalion of advance guard and that of the flank guard debouched at Velpen, to the west and south of this locality.

The lancers, whose magnificent resistance had lasted since the morning, felt themselves saved when the news of the arrival of the infantry was brought to them. As the companies reached Loxbergen they were thrown, notwithstanding the fatigues of their forced march, into the mêlée. Six companies were sent from the château of Blekkom to retake Velpen and Haelen; one battalion covered this movement on the right.

Another battalion received the order to reoccupy the farm of Yserebeek. Three companies remained in reserve.

The attack was vigorously prosecuted. On the right it advanced rapidly. The units sent towards Velpen were received at the outskirts with a violent machine-gun fire. After a moment of hesitation the infantry charged and plunged into the village. There an ambushade awaited them. Machine guns, hidden in the houses, let the flood of the assailants pass, then suddenly unmasked and mowed them down from the rear, breaking the dash of their advance. To rid oneself of these treacherous machines it was necessary to set fire to the houses which sheltered them.

All this time, in the centre, around the farm of Yserebeek a furious combat was continuing. Numerous pieces, well concealed, supported the counter-attacks of the enemy. But the three batteries of the 4th Brigade fired with a precision so devastating that, little by little, the attack progressed. The farm was taken; and Velpen in its turn soon fell into the hands of the Belgians.

To make an end of the affair, General de Witte, at four o'clock, collected all that remained available of his 1st Brigade—three squadrons and a half—and hurled them on the left of the attack towards Bokkenberg and Liebroeck, with instructions to fall on the enemy's flank.

Towards half-past five the Germans began to give signs of weakening. Little by little they drew off, whilst the fire of their machine guns still checked the pressure of the Belgians.

At last they gave way completely and retired precipitately on Haelen. The fatigue of the Belgians and the hellish fire of the machine guns prevented pursuit. At night the enemy completely abandoned the banks of the Gette, and retired on the whole line, leaving behind them the standard of the Death's-head Hussars, their dead, and their wounded. Their losses were enormous; their cavalry division had been literally decimated, notwithstanding the support of infantry of the first class. On the morrow more than three thousand German corpses were found on the field of battle. The ground was strewn with horses which were dead or writhing in death agonies.



Such was the victorious combat of Haelen, which, since the transformations of modern warfare, to-day appears to us as a vague reminiscence of ancient times. The charges of cavalry on horses with quivering nostrils, their riders bent over their necks, the lance or sword seeking to penetrate the flesh of the enemy, the uproar like a storm, the cries and shouts of terror or triumph, now appear no longer in the order of things. The humble village of Haelen was perhaps the last witness of them.

This battle did honour to the arms of Belgium. Six regiments of German cavalry, belonging to the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions, supported by the 7th and 9th battalions of chasseurs and by three batteries, took part in this action. To these 4,000 horsemen, 2,000 foot soldiers, 18 cannons and numerous machine guns the Belgians were, during the greater part of the struggle, able to oppose only 2,400 horsemen, 410 cyclists, 12 cannons, and 6 machine guns.

It was not until after three o'clock in the afternoon that they were able to add some 3,000 rifles, the 12 cannons, and the 12 machine guns of the 4th mixed brigade.

The Belgians, in the course of this first serious action in the open field, lost 22 officers and 1,100 men killed, wounded, or missing. The troops of the cavalry division and those of the 4th Brigade had alike shown a courage, an endurance, and an ardour that were magnificent.

Some units of the 4th Brigade had been present at the engagement at Orsmael, had bivouacked without fires on the night of the 11th-12th, and had then traversed nearly 25 kilometres, to be afterwards thrown into the heat of the fight.

The King rewarded the bravery of these troops by authorizing them to inscribe on their flags, standards, emblems, and gun-shields the glorious name of Haelen.<sup>1</sup>

War correspondents, in quest of sensational news, abounded on the field of battle. One of them, an Englishman, described his visit in these terms:—

Fine fellows, these little Belgians; intelligent and quick to respond. Rather weary now, and strained, for many of them have been already long in the field. Day and night they have been fighting at odds of ten to one. They are men who think, and they fight the better for it. A desperately exhausting fight it is. Dispersed in parties over their immense front, they have to rush and concentrate the moment that one of the small squadrons of German cavalry, infinitely scattered, is signalled. Some thus have been in three separate engagements on one day, in different places. But they are as stout-hearted as ever. Tell them what the world thinks of their heroism, and they smile with half humorous pleasure. Tell them what we guess of the nearness of their allies, and they crowd round with an unselfconscious delight that is not for themselves but for their nation and their cause. The fields outside the village are a terrible sight, littered with dead men and horses, broken guns and twisted lances. In one trench alone twelve hundred Germans were being buried, and the harrow was passed over the brown scar as it was filled in. Cottages burned and black with shell fire, with dead cattle in the sheds. There were furrows where the shell had ploughed, and trampled heaps in the crops and among the blood-stained roots, where the charging horses had been mown down in masses.

<sup>1</sup> There took part in this engagement: 1st and 2nd Guides; 4th and 5th Lancers; mounted artillery; a cyclist battalion and pioneer cyclist battalion of the cavalry division; 4th and 24th of the Line; artillery of the 4th mixed brigade.

Among the fragments of leather equipments and of helmets are scraps of letters and of postal-cards which the soldiers carried with them in case of death, and a book of German hymns prepared for the campaign.<sup>1</sup>

Another war correspondent, an American this time, was much impressed by the intense ferocity with which a commander of a battery of machine guns shouted in the direction of the Germans, "The assassins! The barbarians!"<sup>2</sup>

Possibly the American, sceptical and caustic by temperament, did not rightly understand the deep significance of this cry of hate. Yet it can be so easily explained. At Haelen the "barbarians" had been again at their work, and had continued the traditions of Liège.<sup>3</sup> They had fired upon the inhabitants of the village who were taking flight from their houses during the combat; they had attacked members of the Red Cross and killed wounded men. The commandant Van Damme, wounded and lying on his back, would have been killed by the German infantry.<sup>4</sup>

Men unable to defend themselves endured once more the counter-stroke of defeat.

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Young, *From the Trenches: Louvain to the Aisne*, pp. 47-50, London, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Palmer, *My Year of the War*, p. 5, London and New York, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> See Evidence and Documents, depositions *h5* and *h7* (the deposition *h5* does not appear to us to be conclusive), depositions *k3* and *k4*. The confusion in dates introduced by the witnesses does not affect the substance of their allegations.

<sup>4</sup> This formal accusation is made by a report published on the 25th August 1914 by the Belgian Government and communicated to the English Press Bureau by the Legation of London. See J. M. Kennedy, *The Campaign round Liège*, p. 145.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ADVANCE EN MASSE OF THE GERMAN ARMIES AND THE COMBATS ON THE GETTE

IMPORTANT as the engagement at Haelen was, it in no way disclosed the dispositions made by the enemy, and afforded no sufficient indication of the number of the troops which were believed to be marching upon the Belgian positions behind the screen of cavalry. The cavalry—very numerous, at least 10,000 strong—practically inundated the country. It was supported by battalions of infantry, who moved rapidly by motors.

The Belgian reconnoitring service with difficulty pierced this thick veil.<sup>1</sup>

During the week of the combat at Haelen other engagements took place between groups of cavalry and Belgian scouts or advance guards on the whole front, and especially at Hanut and at Eghezée. The engagement at Eghezée<sup>2</sup> took place on the 13th, the day after Haelen. The enemy having tested the Belgian left at Haelen, had sent another group to test the right in the precise direction where a gap existed in the Belgian lines between the positions of the Gette and that of Namur.

A troop of some 300 German cavalry and 400 cyclists, supported by motor machine guns, penetrated as far as the vicinity of Eghezée. Finding no Belgian soldiers in this direction, the Germans quietly occupied the château of Boneffe, pillaged it, and afterwards bivouacked by the side of the road, preparing a meal. The news of their arrival having been signalled at Namur, an aviator, as it appears, went to explore their exact situation. Two squadrons and two companies of Belgian cyclists immediately quitted Namur and fell unexpectedly upon the enemy at their ease. The Germans, completely surprised, had a considerable number killed or wounded. They also left in the hands of the Belgians several prisoners, some horses, cycles, and motor machine guns.

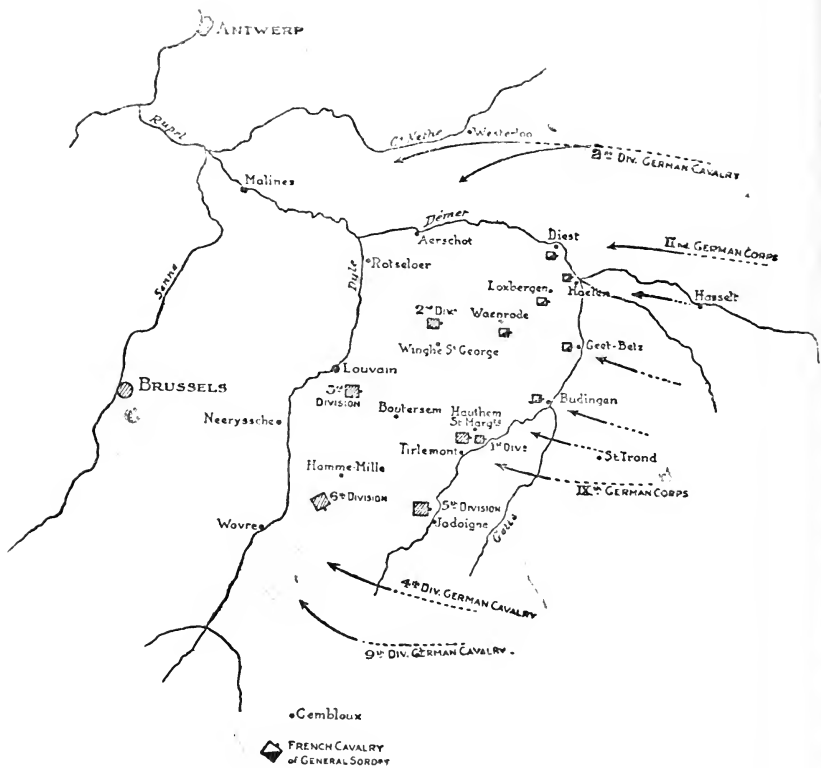
Sunday the 16th August was marked by the very serious incident of Longueville.

Some German forces had taken the offensive at this point, at the extremity of the Belgian right wing. They were repulsed, beat a retreat, and were pursued on the morrow and on the day following.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 38; J. Buchan, op. cit. p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> See on this subject Geoffrey Young, *From the Trenches: Louvain to the Aisne*, pp. 41-2; an official Belgian communiqué of the 13th August 1914 (reproduced in Kennedy, *The Campaign round Liège*, p. 83), communiqué of the English Press Bureau, 14th August 1914 (ibid., p. 93); cf. also J. Buchan, op. cit. p. 156; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> See *Courrier de l'Armée*, 12th December 1914, article "La Campagne de Belgique."



THE COMBATS ON THE GETTE, 18TH AUGUST 1914.

On the 17th August information gathered by the Headquarters of the army revealed a situation calculated seriously to disquiet the Staff.<sup>1</sup>

In front of the left of the army the enemy had been signalled at Wilderen, St.-Trond, Tongres, Hasselt, Herck-St.-Lambert, Lummen, Kermpt, Stocroy, Genck, Asch, Beeringen, Tessenderloo, Bourg-Léopold, Moll. It was known also that very numerous troops had passed the bridges at Lixhe.

In front of the centre of the army large forces of the enemy had been announced in the majority of the places situated in the vicinity of Esemael, Landen, Waremmes, Hanut.

On the right of the army the enemy had large forces near Huppaye, Jauchelette, Piétrebais; troops were crossing the Meuse at Ampsin, repairing the bridge of Huy, and there crossing the river.

Doubt was no longer possible: the last forts of Liège had just fallen, opening to the invading march access to the central plains of Belgium. To how many thousands of men the whole mass amounted was not yet known; the information gathered on the 18th August, the places occupied by the assailants and the violence of their attacks were soon to disperse all illusions, if any still existed.

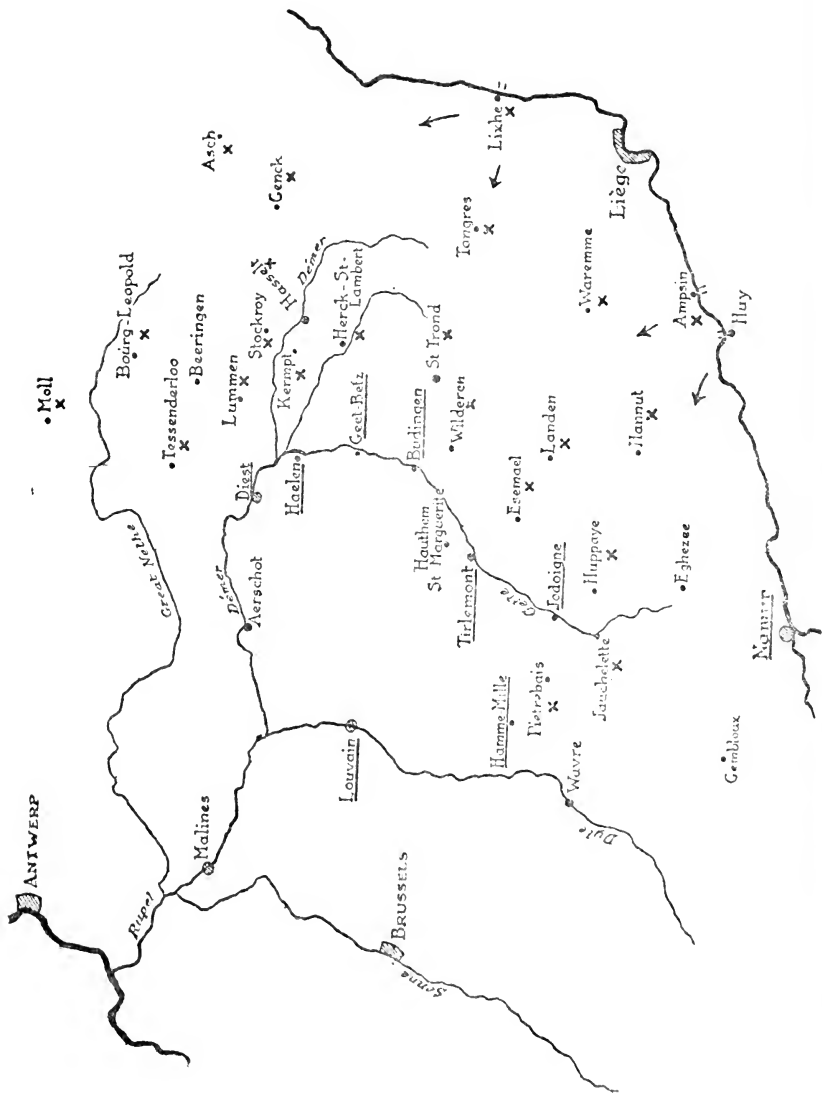
The situation became distinctly critical on the morning of the 18th. That was the day of the engagements of the Gette, during which the Belgians conducted themselves with admirable courage and tenacity.<sup>2</sup>

The Gette was guarded from Diest to Jodoigne. The division of cavalry held positions at Diest itself, at Zelck, Haelen, Geet-Betz, Budingen, Drieslinter; the main body of its forces were, after the combat at Haelen, near Loxbergen and Waenrode. In the region of Tirlemont, between Neerlinter and Overlaer, the front was held by the 1st Army Division; on the right, in the vicinity of Jodoigne, was the 5th Division. The 6th Division, near Hamme-Mille, and the 3rd, which was resting near Louvain after its fatigues at Liège, formed the second line. As for the 2nd Division, it had been, in the course of the day, sent in the direction of Winghe-St.-Georges to lengthen the left wing of the army and to support the cavalry division.

The combat of the 18th August began with an engagement on the Belgian left. There the cavalry division was attacked upon its whole front from Budingen to Diest. The first contact took place towards 7 a.m. at Budingen and at Geet-Betz, defended by two squadrons of the 1st Scouts. Some German infantry, supported by artillery, attempted to force the passage of the river. At 7.30 the enemy attacked Haelen, which was bombarded. Still farther north, at Diest, important forces belonging to the German 2nd Corps threatened the extreme left of the Belgian front. At all these points the resistance was vigorous. At Budingen and at Geet-Betz the scouts valiantly disputed the passage, fighting on foot for about two hours. Lieutenant Wolfgang d'Ursel was killed there at the head of his men. Unhorsed, and losing a good deal of blood, he continued to the last to encourage his men, forbidding them to quit the struggle in order to carry him to the ambulance. This brave

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 21-2.

<sup>2</sup> We have consulted *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 22-3; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 41-6; Commandant W. Breton, "Le 22<sup>e</sup> de Ligne à Hauthem-St.-Marguerite," in *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, pp. 17-19.



THE GERMAN MENACE ON THE BELGIAN POSITIONS, 17TH AUGUST 1914.

The points at which the enemy was signalled are marked X.

man had previously rendered his country signal services at Liège. Having set out on the 3rd August with five of the men of his platoon, he scoured the country until the 7th through the woods which extended up to the Prussian frontier. He crept thus as far as Malmédy, and was able to report to his superiors information of the greatest value.

Finally the scouts were thrown back by the German infantry, who, thanks to the support of a powerful artillery, succeeded in fording the river.

At Haelen also the Belgians were compelled to beat a retreat. The two platoons of cyclist carabinieri and the squadron of the 5th Lancers who were there had been shortly after nine o'clock attacked by the enemy's infantry. These soon reached the banks of the Gette and threw bridges across. The Belgians then withdrew to Loxbergen.

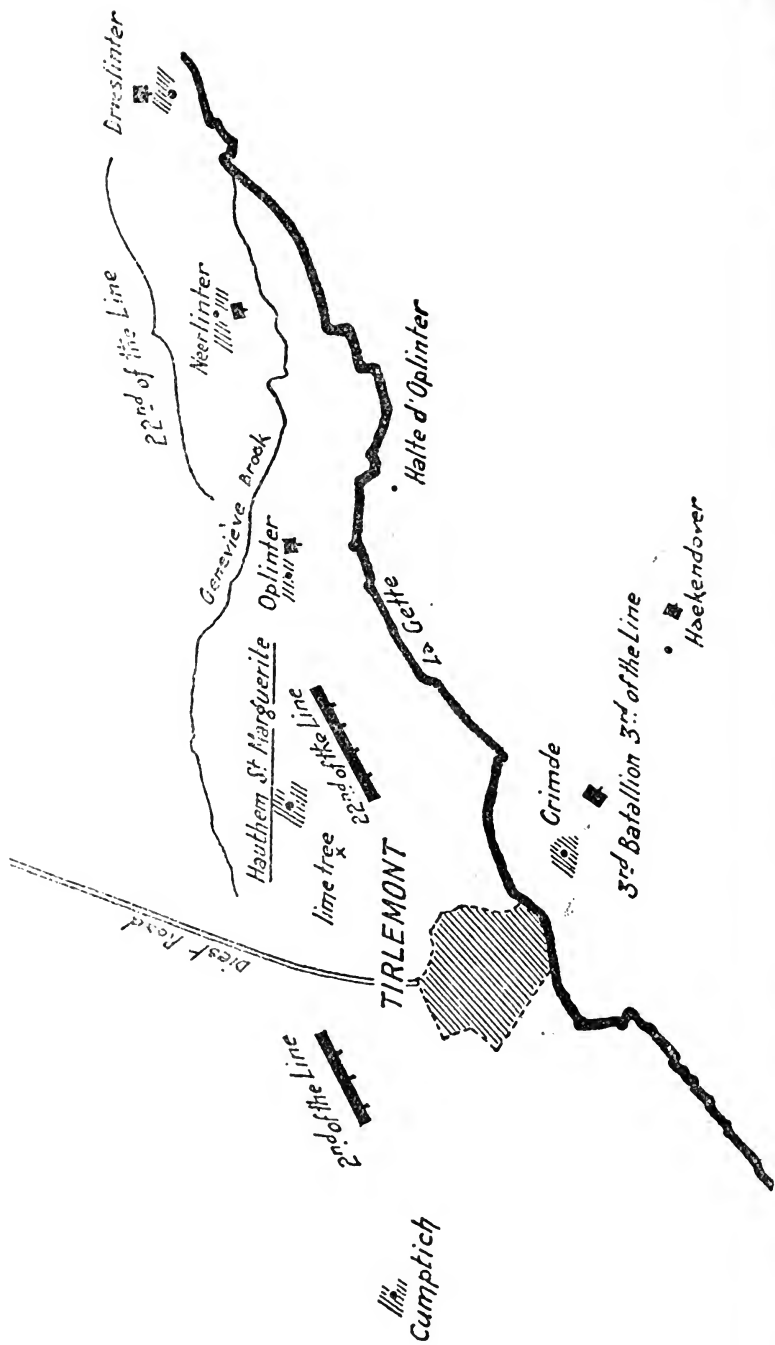
The front having been pierced at three places, the division of cavalry beat a retreat about eleven o'clock on Winghe-St.-Georges, where they were supported by the 2nd Army Division, which, as we have said, had started from Louvain in this direction.

It was possible successfully to accomplish this retreat, thanks to the tenacious resistance opposed to the enemy by the troops which held Diest. There two platoons of cyclists, with two machine guns, and a company of pioneers defended themselves furiously for nearly two hours against a whole brigade of the 2nd German Corps, supported by twelve guns. They did not evacuate their position until noon, when their machine guns, fouled and of no further service, were unusable, and the enemy were about to seize the Belgian position from the rear.

Whilst the left Belgian wing was thus forced to abandon the portion of the line on the Gette which it had hitherto held, another German attack was shaping itself, near the centre, against the position occupied by the 1st Division in the vicinity of Tirlemont. The assailants belonged to the 9th Corps, which had already fought at Liège: they had with them a numerous and powerful artillery.

The centre of the conflict was formed by the positions of Hauthem-Ste.-Marguerite, a large village situated some 3 kilometres north-east of Tirlemont. It was here that the 22nd Regiment of the Belgian Line was stationed, which had been formed by dividing the 2nd at the moment of mobilization. This regiment was directly supported by the artillery of the 2nd mixed brigade, twelve pieces of 7.5 centimetres, posted near Hauthem.

The engagement began with skirmishes between the enemy scouts and the advanced Belgian posts at Haekendover, Oplinter, and Neerlinter. In particular a cavalry party which approached from the halt at Oplinter was repulsed. The attack soon developed itself at the two extremities of the front occupied by the 22nd of the Line at Neerlinter and Grimde. At 1 p.m. the action was in full course. At the station of Grimde the 3rd battalion of the 3rd of the Line was sharply cannonaded, and almost immediately attacked by the German infantry. The force posted at Neerlinter on the other wing was attacked by forces six times superior to it in number. In the centre the 22nd of the Line was overwhelmed by a very lively fire of shrapnel. The artillery of the 2nd Brigade, which was supporting the regiment, was suddenly attacked in flank by a precise fire, directed by a number of enemy aeroplanes, that let fall above the Belgian positions a shower of



THE COMBAT OF HAUTHEM, 18TH AUGUST 1914.



metallic spangles, which sparkled in the sun and were plainly visible to the German gunners. Soon the captain-commandant of the 2nd battery, de Hollain, fell. To put an end to this critical situation the gunners, under a hellish fire, drew their pieces out of this dangerous zone, and from their new position engaged in a vigorous duel with the adversary.

Soon the German infantry, who could be seen in grey masses advancing across the plain, arrived at the banks of the Gette, crossed the river, and sprang forward in close, deep ranks. Whilst the converging fire of the German guns became more and more murderous, the enemy's foot menaced the flanks of the positions occupied by the 22nd of the Line. Rifles and machine guns rattled and clattered, mowing down the serried lines of the assailants. The bleeding void filled itself up immediately, and the grey mass continued its implacable advance.

In such conditions the 22nd of the Line saw more and more numerous gaps made in its ranks, yet the men did not yield. They appeared to be riveted to the ground, maintaining all their positions on the principal line in face of the desperate efforts of the assailants. The ground was strewn with corpses, but stoically, with a fierce determination of soul, the survivors still fought with a mien of defiance and a sublime obstinacy.

On the wings the small detached posts rivalled in courage the defenders of the centre. The 150 men entrenched at Neerlinter were attacked frontally and on the flank; but they kept the Germans in check for more than two hours. Finally, about 5 p.m.—when they were reduced to some thirty—they withdrew upon Hauthem-Ste.-Marguerite, with their faces to the enemy, fighting all the way, catching at any shelter that offered, firing without ceasing, furious at being compelled to yield, and refusing to recognize defeat. The force at Oplinter endured stoically a violent bombardment for four hours, and gave way hardly a kilometre and a half.

Finally, at Grimde, the battalion of the 3rd of the Line fought with fury from 2 p.m. to 4.30, never allowing themselves to be driven back a few yards without recovering with a desperate dash the lost ground. At the moment when they received the order to withdraw they were threatened with being taken from the rear, and had lost 50 per cent. of their effective. The captain-commandant Sidders had been killed.

Up to 5 p.m. the attacks of the enemy had been checked, on a front of 7 kilometres, by 1,800 men and 12 guns.

Howbeit, for reasons whose value we shall presently see, the supreme Headquarters, established at Louvain, had, towards the end of the afternoon, given an order for the retreat of the whole army.

The troops at Hauthem-Ste.-Marguerite were too heavily pressed by the assailants to be able to execute this movement. They therefore continued to fight and to allow themselves to be decimated until they received a positive order to break off the engagement. At this moment the 22nd was ranged in the arc of a circle around the village. It began a methodical retreat. One by one in the twilight, which was already setting in, the remains of the companies fell back in good order, under the conduct of such officers as had not already fallen. In their lines of skirmishers the men crouched in the ditches, hedges, and

isolated farms, withdrawing from shelter to shelter, and stopping to repel, by accurate fire, the enemy, already out of breath. Scattered between Le Tilleul de Hauthem and the brook Geneviève, scarcely a thousand men yielded slowly under the continuous explosion of shrapnel and the tac-tac of the machine guns.

The Germans tried to outflank these brave fellows, in the hope of raising a panic and of destroying them. They seized Tirlemont after the retreat of the defenders of Grimde. About 5.30 p.m. their infantry and a section of artillery debouched from the town; one part of these troops enfiladed the road to Diest, another making its way towards Cumptich. The 2nd Regiment of the Line barred their way; it had deployed along the road to Diest itself. The impetus of the enemy was stopped short by the fire of the Belgians.

An hour later the Germans returned to the charge: they violently bombarded the positions of the Belgians on the road to Diest; afterwards their infantry rushed to the attack. The troop which had succeeded in reaching Cumptich fell on the platoon of gendarmes of the 3rd Brigade. The gendarmes immediately charged and put the Germans to flight, after having left on the field the greater part of their own effectives. On the road to Diest also the German attack had piteously failed.

The enemy was decidedly at his last gasp. At 8 p.m. the German trumpets sounded "Cease fire!"

With the night a great silence fell on Hauthem-Ste.-Marguerite, whilst the 1st Army Division withdrew in the direction of Louvain. Of the thirty-seven officers of the 22nd of the Line, twenty-three remained on the battlefield, and the regiment itself was reduced to about 900 men. Half its effectives had succumbed in this unequal struggle.

The King paid homage to the valour of the regiment by permitting it to inscribe on its flag: *Hauthem-Ste.-Marguerite, 18th August 1914.*

Had it not, for eight hours, held up an important part of the 9th German Corps?

Whilst the struggle was particularly violent on the left wing and in the centre of the positions on the Gette, on the front held by the 5th Division of the army on the right wing there were only some skirmishes between outposts. At nightfall some shells were thrown on the positions where the 1st Brigade was reforming, near Hougaerde, at Hauthem-Ste.-Catherine, and Aalst.

On the extreme right General Sordet's French cavalry division (which had advanced in the direction of Gembloux), having heard that the enemy were occupying this town, detached some advanced squadrons who drove the Germans out of the locality. The French, however, did not pass the town.

Such were the engagements on the Gette, where troops who faced fire for the first time, and that in an action in open country, against an enemy greatly superior in effectives and provided with numerous artillery, behaved with the greatest heroism.

Nevertheless, in spite of all this expenditure of courage and energy, the general retreat of the army became imperative. The chief Headquarters, in the afternoon of the 18th August, had in

their possession information which enabled them to foresee that a formidable avalanche was about to throw itself upon the little Belgian army. Three German army corps, the 2nd, 4th, and 9th, were marching on the left wing of the army between Diest and Tirlemont. The 2nd Division of German cavalry flanked them on the right and threatened an enveloping movement between the Grande Nèthe and the Démer.

Three other army corps, the 3rd, 7th, and 10th, coming from the right bank of the Meuse (which they had passed between Liège and Huy), were marching on the right wing towards the front of Soudigne-Namur.

The 4th and 9th Divisions of cavalry preceded them, and were making an enveloping movement by Wayre and Gembloux.

Finally, these six corps of the first line were followed by five corps of reserve.

Thus, independently of the German forces moving towards France by the provinces of Luxemburg and Namur, there were eleven army corps and three divisions of cavalry, representing a total of about 100,000 men, supported by 600 machine guns and 1,800 pieces of artillery, advancing upon the Belgian positions.

It would have been madness to decide on risking a battle in such conditions, particularly in view of the fact that the enveloping movement, which was shaping by Westerloo, threatened to cut the Belgians off from their base at Antwerp. In conclusion, the armies of the allied nations were not, at this moment, in a position to furnish the Belgian troops with effective help.

In fact, the 5th French Army, which had been directed to Belgium on the day when the violation of Belgian neutrality had been consummated, had a corps holding the bridges over the Meuse from Hastière to Namur, and the bridges over the Sambre from Floreffe to Tamines. The other three corps of this army were expected in the region of Philippeville on the 19th. In addition, this French force on the Meuse was itself directly threatened by the Saxon army of General Von Hausen, the vanguard of which had already attacked Dinant on the 15th August.<sup>1</sup>

As for the English army, it was at this moment disembarking south of the Sambre, near Maubeuge. Only the cavalry division had completed its landing. It would be necessary to wait until the 22nd or 23rd August to see the English begin their advance.<sup>2</sup>

It was therefore certain that, in these circumstances, the Belgian army, amounting to about two corps, would find itself alone, faced by eleven corps of the enemy. Nothing remained for the troops of King Albert but to escape rapidly from the formidable trap which the enemy had prepared for its destruction.

In conformity with the principles to which the high military authorities resolutely adhered (principles we have explained above), the King resolved on the retreat of the army towards the north-east.

This decision was taken in the afternoon of the 18th, and the movement was ordered to take place at 7.30 p.m. It would be executed

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, i. pp. 205-9, and the despatch of Field-Marshal French of the 7th September 1914 (J. Buchan, op. cit. i., Appendix I).

at dawn of the 19th, and was to bring the army to a new line of natural defence, the left bank of the Dyle.

These positions occupied a front passing from Rotselaer to Neeryssche with Louvain as centre.<sup>1</sup>

To cover this movement on the left, and to protect it from the enterprises of the enemy, who might attempt an envelopment between the Grande Nèthe and the Démer, a brigade of the 3rd Division was left at Aerschot.

Thus ended the day of the 18th August.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 25; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 46.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE COMBAT AT AERSCHOT—THE RETREAT ON ANTWERP— THE GERMANS AT LOUVAIN

In the afternoon of the 18th August, news of an alarming character spread among the population of Louvain. There were vague rumours about a defeat of the Belgians in the direction of Diest and Haelen. It was said that the Headquarters established at the hôtel de ville at Louvain had left, that the railway station was closed and the service of trains suspended. These tidings were premature and exaggerated, but they filled the hearts of the inhabitants with anguish. At the beginning of the evening a column of poor people flowed on to the boulevards, men, women, and children, carrying with them household linen and bundles knotted up in haste. These were villagers who were flying before the advance of the enemy. The people of Louvain had a sudden intuition of the catastrophe that threatened themselves. Shops were shut. Groups formed at the corners of the streets, trying to reassure one another, without, however, succeeding.

Towards ten the posts of the civic guard established in the immediate vicinity of the town saw arriving small groups of refugees, whose incoherent stories did not throw much light on the situation. All the more there was reason to conclude that the enemy was advancing in the direction of Louvain. In the distance could be seen a light that stood out at first palely and then more clearly against a sky of thick gloom. Soon the horizon became red in the direction of Tirlemont. Without doubt fires were burning there. Fires lighted by whom? As yet no one knew. As time passed the flood of refugees became larger and larger. They were a lamentable spectacle, these peasants bringing carts on which they had piled their most precious belongings—bits of furniture and household linen—accompanied by the wives and children, these last crying for fear, or perchance from hunger. When questioned by the civic guard, the unfortunate people replied sometimes with monosyllables or groans, sometimes pouring out a torrent of words in which mention of battle, fire, and murder continuously recurred. It then became plain that the Belgian army was in retreat, and that it was making in the direction of Louvain: the foremost ranks might be expected at any moment.

At 10 p.m. the ambulance established at the school of St. Thomas, Rue de Tirlemont, received a visit from a Belgian sergeant, who announced that the rear-guard of the army had been attacked by the Germans at Roosbeek and at Boutersem, and that wounded men would be undoubtedly brought in. The first of these arrived at eleven.

Soon appeared, coming by the Tirlemont road and by adjacent

roads, the survivors of the combatants of Grimde and of Hauthem-Stee. Marguerite, harassed, and covered with perspiration and dust, but still full of resolution. They had only one idea, one wish—to sleep; no matter where; only to sleep. They were worn out.

Afterwards, throughout the night, ensued a continuous flow of soldiers, of horses, of caissons, of artillery, of wagons, defiling through the black, deserted streets.

Above the railway station a "Taube" was already hovering, to the sinister humming of its machinery. In the distance dull reports indicated an artillery engagement. No doubt the Belgian rear-guard was protecting the retreat of the army by an attempt to delay the advance of the enemy.

At dawn the noise of guns became more and more clearly perceptible, announcing to the anxious townfolk that the invader was approaching.

Some few civilians loitered about near the exits from the railway station, trying to snatch some news from the civic guard who were in charge of the station, and who themselves knew no more than any one else.

Towards five o'clock in the morning news, coming no one knew whence, was circulating that the Belgian army was about to retire on the fortified position of Antwerp. Was that really true? People who pretended to be well informed said that the French had just arrived near Waterloo, and were about to join the Belgians. Next moment this was contradicted. The wildest rumours were in circulation.

About six in the morning the civic guard was disarmed, whilst incidents whose significance was evident to every one showed that Louvain was about to be left to its fate. The last picket of gendarmes, which had until then formed the guard at Headquarters, entered the railway station, conducting with them a German prisoner, and mounted into a train which drew off in the direction of Antwerp. That was the end.

Shortly before eight the civic guard was dismissed, while the thundering of the artillery drew nearer and nearer in the directions of Lovenjoul and of Corbeek-Loo.

At this very moment grave incidents were taking place at Aerschot. We have said above that on the evening of the 18th August the Belgian army, having received the command to retire on the front Rotselaer-Louvain-Neerysche, a brigade of the 3rd Division of the army had been left at Aerschot to cover the left.

It was attacked at dawn on the 19th August. It comprised the 9th and 14th of the Line, two regiments which had already at Liège covered themselves with glory. The 9th covered the approach to Aerschot on the north, whilst the 14th, with a battalion of the 26th, was stationed to the east of the town. In the night of the 18th-19th August the enemy had already appeared. These were troops of the 2nd German Corps, who, after having made a feint of an enveloping movement by Westerloo, now fell back on Aerschot. The soldiers of the 9th of the Line, engaged in entrenching themselves, were several times revealed by the rays from an electric searchlight, and several shots were exchanged between the patrols.

The action began at dawn. A reconnoitring party which had

advanced as far as Betecom encountered half-way a strong troop of uhlans. A squadron of cavalry appeared on the Westerloo road. It was dispersed by the fire of a machine gun. Soon an intermittent fusillade was rattling all along the front.

Towards six two German aeroplanes, circling very low, came flying over the Belgian positions. Almost immediately afterwards the German infantry appeared on the edge of the wood, and the artillery began to thunder. The attack was violent. A hail of shells fell on the outskirts of Aerschot and on the trenches of the 9th of the Line. In spite of their numerical inferiority the Belgians resisted bravely on the whole of the front. It was especially before Aerschot itself that the contest was sharp and desperate. For the space of two hours, with an indomitable courage, the men of the 4th company of the 9th of the Line repelled their assailants, inflicting upon them considerable losses. Towards eight o'clock they fell back on the town, under a hellish fire, but supported to the last minute by two machine guns.

The retreat was conducted by Commandant Georges Gilson, who behaved like a hero. A bullet broke the bone of his nose. His face covered with blood, he himself, like his men, continued to fire at the enemy, and it was not until eight o'clock, when he was simultaneously attacked on the front and on the right flank, when his machine guns had become unusable, that he collected the handful of men left to him and withdrew through Aerschot towards Louvain.<sup>1</sup>

The engagement at Aerschot proved that the enemy's right was outflanking the Belgian left, and that the army was still in danger of being encircled. It was therefore no longer possible to hold the front Rotselaer-Louvain-Neerysche, chosen the previous day. As the line of the Gette, the line of the Dyle would have to be abandoned.

The King, who in the morning had transferred his Headquarters from Louvain to Malines, thereupon ordered his troops to retire upon the fortified position of Antwerp. Accordingly, the movement proceeded on the other side of the Dyle, and was continued during the day and the night of the 19th. On the 20th August at dawn the field army, without having suffered serious losses, halted within the circle of the forts of the first line.<sup>2</sup>

The rapidity and sang-froid with which this dangerous manœuvre was executed under the menace of an enemy pursuing with forced marches are well represented in the following narrative,<sup>3</sup> told by a soldier who took part in the movement.

20 August 1914.

Here we are at X—. Our retreat was one of a suddenness and rapidity that are astonishing.

Here is exactly what happened:

After our arrival at Munsel-Kieseghem (I concealed that from you, fearing to disquiet you) we worked at the trenches. Aided by the engineers we had constructed shelters against shrapnel. We had cut down some trees and some coppices, and had covered the ground with artificial thickets, more or less well imitated. We were getting

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 47-8; G. Gilson, "Aerschot (19 août 1914)," in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 90-9.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 25; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 43-53.

<sup>3</sup> Published in *Le Bien public* of Ghent, 27th August 1914.

ready for an engagement. The line was far extended and seemed to stretch from Diest to Tirlemont. In front of us the enemy was making his appearance, and had already fought at Haelen. We formed the left wing of the troops, and faced the north-east, being protected only by some advanced posts intended to provoke an attack and then to withdraw upon us. I may say that we were well prepared, and we were awaiting the Germans confidently. Finally, on Tuesday,<sup>1</sup> it was announced that they were approaching. An order not to quit the trenches was immediately given. An outlook post was detached, at 800 metres from the front line, to watch the horizon. Thinking that this would be interesting, I requested, as well as H—— and some university students, to be of the party. It was noon. About three o'clock some shots, not far in front of us, were exchanged between the uhlands and the sentinels of our outpost, where we had been the previous evening. To the north and the south-east the guns thundered very loudly. At the same time all around, at a short distance, all the houses encumbering the range of fire of our artillery blew up. They had been previously mined. The same was done with the mills and towers which could serve the enemy as landmarks.

At six o'clock we were relieved from our posts and re-entered the trenches in the woods. The evening came with the watch under arms. All around the horizon was illumined by the fires lighted by the Belgians. Two hamlets, which inconvenienced us, were flaming, and the smoke of the ruins mined in the afternoon stood out against the setting sun in a tragic manner. Nevertheless we were happy at the idea that we were going to fight against the Germans, whom so many others, according to the newspapers, drove back every day. So we lay down in our bivouac under the firs, certain that the struggle would begin either that very night or on the morning of the morrow. We had already seen shrapnel fall on Molenbeek, 3 kilometres from us. I fell asleep peacefully. At midnight, réveillé all of a sudden! How stupefying! It was not for a battle, but for a retreat. We were to quit the trenches which we had dug so courageously and with perfect confidence. Why this retreat? No one knew. Whither? In the direction of Louvain: that was all that there was to be said. We had scarcely risen when we heard a sharp fusillade fired at a distance of some hundred metres by our covering troops.

We assembled under the shelter of a fir wood, fled off in the night. On the road from Diest to Louvain we resumed our positions in the 2nd Army Division. At the height of Lubbeek we struck aside towards Aerschot to protect the retreat of the 9th of the Line, which was seriously menaced. All this time, behind us and on our right, we could hear our artillery protecting our retreat. At ten o'clock a halt at Werchter in a sunny field. A short repose of three-quarters of an hour. Then off again. We reach Tremeloo. There the uhlands have been seen that very morning. The guns thunder again. We begin in haste to make trenches, which we soon abandon to press on towards Auderloo. There our company takes skirmishing order on the two sides of the road by the edge of a fir forest bordered with low bushes. Twice we quitted this position, to return to it immediately. Again the guns thunder, and rifle-shots are heard at a short distance. But this cannot have been in our direction, for we were in the first line, and actually formed the advance guard, and we had heard neither shot nor shrapnel. Suddenly a mounted chasseur arrives, makes a communication to the commanding officer, and again we continue our retreat. Now it is in the direction of Malines. How tired we were when at eight o'clock in the evening we arrived at Putte, in the south of the province of Antwerp! You will understand that better when I tell you that we had marched since midnight, that is to say twenty hours, without having eaten anything except barrack-bread and slices of bread and butter given us by the townsfolk. Add to that some cups of coffee, some milk, and fruit that we had gathered on our march. I had been lucky enough to get two eggs at a farm, for ready money, and that was all. It is true that every one of us had two boxes of reserve rations in his sack; but I was absolutely too done up to eat sardines and preserved boiled beef. So, having slept a few hours, a start at once from Putte, and we arrive by a multiplicity of detours at Lierre, at half-past nine! Phew! We were worn out! My first idea was to get a bucket of water and to have a wash; my second, to go in search of a beef-steak. I have found both, and am a different man. H—— marched admirably for a man without training. But he was quite exhausted. He nearly fainted at the end of the march this morning, and now at midday has not been able to eat. As for me, I have two little blisters on my feet, and that is all. We are now resting at X——, whence I am writing to you.

<sup>1</sup> The 18th August.



This letter shows with what promptitude the left wing of the army, formed by the 2nd Division after the engagements on the Gette, effected its retreat. But a clearer idea of the endurance and the discipline of these men is formed when it is remembered that the 5th Division was in the vicinity of Jodoigne, and the 6th had encamped near Hamme-Mille, and that, to reach the line of the outer forts of Antwerp, they had to make a forced march of more than 30 kilometres. Thus, for example, the 2nd Chasseurs, who were to the west of Jodoigne, under arms and awaiting orders, was directed during the night through Melin to the large village of Beauvechain. The men arrived there towards midnight, and fell into a heavy sleep. They were awakened at half-past three, still quite dull and stupefied with fatigue, to make their departure. The grey dawn was scarcely breaking when the chasseurs were en route, by Hamme-Mille and Cortenberg, towards Willebroeck. They arrived there on the 20th August, after two crushing stages, knowing nothing of what had happened, nor why they had beaten a hasty retreat without even having fought.<sup>1</sup>

The covering troops arrested, or at least impeded, the pursuit by the enemy, as is evident from the letter which we have quoted. It was particularly on the highroad from Tirlemont to Louvain that these forces, supported by the artillery, fought desperately to afford the different regiments time to execute their retreat in full security.

On the morning of the 19th August, whilst numerous families hastened to the railway station to leave the town by the last train, the inhabitants of Louvain could hear the dull growling of the guns in the direction of Corbeek-Loo and Louvenjoul. There the resistance was desperate. Crouching in the hedges and banks, in hastily improvised intrenchments which barred the whole width of the way to Tirlemont, intrepid soldiers shot with rage at the advancing enemy, and allowed themselves to be annihilated in order to save their comrades.

I left Brussels again late in the evening, says an English war correspondent, and worked down towards Louvain in the dark, meeting the last of the fugitive crowds and the train of wounded. . . . I got forward, avoiding the flank of the retreating Belgians, and making for the light of two burning cottages—my last sight of Louvain.

A few small fights were still going on, as sound and sight indicated. Covering parties of Belgians, in small numbers, were heroically sacrificing themselves to protect the strategic retreat in the northward wheel.

Below a slight field-slope upon the crest of which the flash of rifle-fire and the long snake-rattle of the mitrailleuse showed where some section was still making a last stand, I found a shelter. . . . Clearly, only a few men were holding the trench above. The whistle of shot, well overhead and to my left, was continuous. Soon there was the buzz of a motor down an invisible lane below, and one of the German cars, fitted with a mitrailleuse wheel, got into position, to begin raking them from the rear. By means of motors, in the flood of advance, the Germans have moved up light guns and infantry at the speed of cavalry.

A few scattered shots getting nearer told me that the men above me were running back. One, blundering on so that I could hear his feet, clearly wounded, stopped running, as the sound showed, near me. I got him after a time into the same ditch as myself.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, No. 169 (1915).

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Young, *From the Trenches: Louvain to the Aisne*, pp. 105-7.

At half past one the last Belgian battery came down at full gallop through the Rue de Tirlemont, the artillerymen shouting as they passed: "They are there!"

Some Belgian soldiers, wounded during a resistance of five hours at the gates of the city, were in their last agony at the feet of the trees or the boundary posts which had furnished them with a support. The few inhabitants who had come anxiously to the Porte de Tirlemont, painfully touched, witnessed the last tremors of these heroes. More than one had tears in their eyes, and when a soldier, supported by Belgian stretcher-bearers, breathed his last, all heads were uncovered.<sup>1</sup>

However, the German scouts had already reached the hôtel de ville. They found the burgomaster there in his office and surrounded him, covering him with their revolvers. One of the officers demanded immediately 30,000 kilos of potatoes, another 30,000 kilos of bread, a third 30,000 kilos of flour. If these demands were not at once satisfied, the city must pay 200,000 fr. per diem.<sup>2</sup> The German authorities proceeded to the private banks and seized the cash in hand: they found 300 fr. at the Banque de la Dyle and 12,000 fr. at the Banque Populaire.<sup>3</sup> The booty was small, so the invaders demanded 100,000 fr. from the municipal chest. As no sum so high was in hand, the officers gradually reduced their demands to 3,000 fr. The finance sheriff added a sum of 80 fr., and the German commandant gave a receipt for 3,000.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the day the burgomaster, continuously threatened with shooting if he did not immediately comply with every exaction, was unable to bear up against so much agitation, and had to take to his bed.

Towards 2.30 p.m. numerous troops made a triumphal entry. Cyclists opened the procession, making signs to the inhabitants to be reassured. Behind them, at a little distance, compact masses of infantry advanced to the shrill music of fifes and the heavy roll of drums. Their faces were young, heavy, and hard. From time to time, at a raucous command, every mouth opened to thunder out *Die Wacht am Rhein*. Mounted on frisky chargers, hussars advanced next, elegant and haughty, regarding with a distant and contemptuous air the inhabitants who had ventured to the thresholds of their houses. Next arrived another column of infantry in pointed helmets. Then field guns, a long file of vehicles loaded with ammunition, ambulances, and movable kitchens. Finally, more battalions of infantry, batteries of artillery, and squadrons of uhlans and dragoons. Along the marching columns the cyclists unrolled telephone wires and attached them to the street lamps and electric posts. At the head of the battalions and squadrons mounted officers held in their hands, in leather cases, charts of the vicinity, protected by a plaque of mica.<sup>5</sup>

The songs of triumph and the music redoubled their animation when the troops passed Belgian soldiers, wounded and dying, brought

<sup>1</sup> Hervé de Gruben, *Les Allemands à Louvain. Souvenirs d'un témoin*, p. 25, Paris, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> L. H. Grondys, *Les Allemands en Belgique. Louvain et Aerschot*, p. 39 (*Pages d'histoire*, 1914-15, No. 34).

<sup>3</sup> 5<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports*, p. 70).

<sup>4</sup> L. H. Grondys, *op. cit.* p. 40; 5<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports*, p. 69).

<sup>5</sup> Hervé de Gruben, *op. cit.* pp. 26-8.

from Boutersem and from other places where combats had taken place.

Towards nine o'clock in the evening the flood ceased to flow in the streets, and the soldiers quartered themselves upon the inhabitants. Revolver in hand, the Feldwebel (sergeants) entered the houses and ordered the inmates to billet such and such a number of men—a number often out of proportion to the smallness of the accommodation. The soldiers of the artillery camped in the streets, on the boulevards, and in the public places. They installed their guns on the beautiful lawns, in which the wheels cut deep ruts in the turf; lighted their camp fires and set up their kitchens, whilst their horses were tethered to the ancient plane-trees and chestnuts. Very soon Louvain presented the appearance of a stable; streets, pavements, public places, and trodden-down flower-beds entirely disappeared under a layer of dung. In the buildings belonging to the railway station the furniture was looted and the railway tickets thrown on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

From the very first evening the houses whose proprietors were absent had their doors broken open and were invaded. In these houses, some of which belonged to professors of the University, the cellars were pillaged, works of art were destroyed, the books were torn up, and the scientific instruments broken. Naturally, in conclusion, the beds were used as water-closets.<sup>2</sup> For the rest, the invaders committed no outrages. On the morrow, in conformity with the German principle of terrorism, hostages were taken, who were to answer with their lives for the peaceful behaviour of their fellow-citizens. Amongst them were the burgomaster and the sheriffs, the rector and vice-rector of the University, the Dean of St. Peter's, and other notables.

The walls of the town were covered with placards printed in Germany. These were about "francs-tireurs," "hostages," and "distressing cruelties." In barbarous French the inhabitants were forbidden to be in the streets after eight o'clock in the evening; they were ordered to give up their arms; it was insisted that all doors must be left open at night and the windows in certain streets lighted.<sup>3</sup>

The German standard floated from the roof of the hôtel de ville. The Etappen-Kommandant (commandant of the military station), Major Von Manteuffel, had his quarters there.

Thus the German occupation of Louvain began.

<sup>1</sup> Hervé de Gruben, pp. 29, 31-2; "Le sac de Louvain. Souvenirs d'un témoin," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 11th September 1915.

<sup>2</sup> L. H. Grondys, op. cit. pp. 42-3; Hervé de Gruben, op. cit. pp. 31-9. See also L. Noël, *Louvain*, Oxford, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Hervé de Gruben, op. cit. pp. 32-3; 5<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, p. 69)*; L. Noël, op. cit.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE REIGN OF TERROR DURING THE ADVANCE OF THE INVADING ARMY—THE SACK OF AERSCHOT

As soon as, after the fall of the last forts of Liège, the general mass of the army of Von Kluck marched to the attack of the Belgian army, they were bent upon showing what was meant by the declaration made by the German Government, "Henceforth the war will assume a relentless character."

The German soldiers had already acted on these principles around Liège; they continued their work of terrorism and devastation during their advance across central Belgium.

It was in particular that part of the German army which advanced by way of Limburg to execute an enveloping movement on the Belgian left wing, the 2nd Division of cavalry and the troops of the 2nd Corps, that were guilty of the worst outrages.

On the 16th August the locality of Heers was invaded by uhlans about 3.30 p.m. They compelled the inhabitants to come out of their houses, and for more than an hour marched them through the village with their arms in the air. Afterwards a captain selected at random three men and took them away. Some kilometres from the commune they were shot by the side of the road.<sup>1</sup>

The town of Hasselt got off comparatively easily. On his arrival the enemy seized the cash in hand of the Banque Nationale de Belgique, amounting to 2,075,000 fr. The booty was handsome; accordingly the German commandant contented himself with making the burgo-master announce that if the inhabitants fired on soldiers of the German army, "a third of the male population would be condemned to be shot."<sup>2</sup>

The cavalry troops who advanced on St.-Trond were received with rifle fire by about a score of civic guards and some Belgian soldiers. The latter were soon compelled to retire before the numerical superiority of the enemy. Three civilians were killed in the course of this skirmish; but this incident is apparently attributable to the imprudence of the victims, whom curiosity had prompted to watch the combat. Nevertheless the enemy revenged himself by imprisoning some two hundred of the inhabitants in a barn and setting fire to the houses.<sup>3</sup>

On the 18th August it was the turn of Tongres. In the afternoon the German commandant had expressed his satisfaction at the good reception which the inhabitants had given his men. However, about

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, vol. ii. pp. 70-1).*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* (loc. cit. p. 71). The proclamation of the German commandant is reproduced in the sixteenth report (*Rapports, vol. i. p. 79*).

<sup>3</sup> *Evidence and Documents, deposition k18 (pp. 222-3).*

9 p.m. shots were heard, accompanied by yells of soldiers and whistle-calls by officers. In the quarter of the railway station houses were already on fire. The inhabitants were driven from their houses and compelled to pass the night in the buildings by the roads surrounding the town or in the fields. At least seventeen civilians were killed, amongst whom was a lad of twelve. The town having been evacuated, the soldiers began looting the houses; furniture, pictures, plate, etc., were heaped on vehicles. The Huybrigts Archeological Museum was pillaged and destroyed. On the morrow the mounted troops of the 4th Reserve Corps completed the business.<sup>1</sup>

The same evening, at the village of Cannes, in the course of a disorderly fusillade the Germans penetrated into the back of the house of the burgomaster, M. Poswick, and without any ground cut down his wife, and killed with a bayonet M. Derricks, Advocate of the Court of Appeal, who was carrying in his arms a child of four and a half. The child escaped death.<sup>2</sup>

It was during the attack on Diest (on the 18th August) by the troops of the 2nd Corps that the village of Schaffen, to the north of Diest, was sacked by the enemy in a fury. From the 12th to the 18th many patrols of cavalry had appeared in the locality, but the greater part of them had been killed by the cyclist carabinieri and Belgian cavalry, concealed in the houses and behind the hedges of the village.

Schaffen was thenceforth doomed. When the enemy approached from Diest, along the paved road of Beeringen, the work of destruction began: farms, houses, ricks were burned. Lummen and Molenstede were sacked. On arriving at Schaffen the Germans immediately set it on fire, and massacred the few persons who still remained in the locality, several of whom had concealed themselves in hiding-places. Twenty-two civilians, among whom was the sacristan and some women and children, were assassinated. One hundred and sixty-four houses, including the offices of the commune and the house of the parish priest, were burned; twenty-five were pillaged. The parish priest and two civilians were made prisoners. The parish priest had to endure a veritable torture, which lasted until the following morning. At the moment of his release the Germans fired fifty shots at him from a distance of 200 metres. He let himself fall, pretending to be dead. Afterwards he was able to crawl to Diest. A smith, who was with the priest, had his arms broken; later he was killed.

It was thus that the unfortunate inhabitants of Schaffen paid for the resistance of the Belgian troops.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, vol. ii. pp. 71-2)*; 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (ibid. p. 129)*; diary of a soldier of the 32nd German Regiment of Infantry Reserve, in *Les violations des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne, i. No. 42 (photograph)*; diary of an unknown German soldier, in *Evidence and Documents, p. 266 (No. 33)*. According to this soldier, the inhabitants fired on the troops. This is the stereotyped pretext. In the afternoon there was a mutiny among the German soldiers, who made a claim to take some rest after their fatigues. According to the same soldier, a German was killed. For this "we killed two women and on the next day the men were shot."

<sup>2</sup> 17<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, vol. i. p. 71)*.

<sup>3</sup> 1<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, vol. i. p. 46)*; 15<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (Rapports, vol. ii. pp. 26 and 148, list of civilians killed and of houses burned)*; *Evidence and Documents, depositions k1 and k2*; A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, pp. 35-6; L. H. Grondys, *op. cit.* pp. 38-9.

It is true that the German lieutenant Kietzmann says in his diary: "Some fifty civilians had hidden themselves in the tower of the church, and thence fired on our troops with a machine gun."<sup>1</sup>

There was a machine gun at Schaffen, but it was worked by Belgian soldiers<sup>2</sup>; and it was these same soldiers who, before falling back on Diest, received the enemy with a murderous fire.

During the attack on the Belgian positions on the Gette, on this same 18th August, the enemy was guilty of the same violations of the laws of war which he had committed during the attack upon Liège.<sup>3</sup> Wounded men were killed by blows from the butts of rifles and by bayonet wounds; near Jodoigne a platoon of Bavarian cyclist chas-seurs, proceeding to the attack, compelled the parish priest of Jodoigne and other civilians to precede them with arms crossed. The two men nearest to the priest were mortally wounded by the fusillade.<sup>4</sup> When advancing on Louvain, the Germans sacked the region of Weert-St.-Georges and burned the houses of the village, to the number of twenty-eight. Three civilians were killed. This was because a uhlan had been there killed by a Belgian gendarme in ambush.<sup>5</sup>

Again, on the 18th August, at Hersselt, to the north of Aerschot, after an encounter with the 9th of the Line, the Germans systematically set the village on fire, killed the miller and his son, who were taking flight, as well as twenty-one other civilians; thirty-two<sup>6</sup> houses were devoured by the flames.

More or less everywhere in the region through which the troops of Von Kluck advanced, civilians were killed and houses pillaged and set on fire.<sup>7</sup>

These crimes culminated on the 19th August at the sack of Aerschot. We have seen that on this day, at eight in the morning, the last Belgian troops ceased to fight, and withdrew in the direction of Louvain. Some thirty Belgian soldiers fell into the hands of the Germans. A mounted officer, probably a major, gave an order to shoot the prisoners. They were led to the road by the side of the Démer. Two German companies who happened to be there drove the Belgians before them and fired at them a volley and some isolated shots. A large number of the prisoners were either killed or wounded. The survivors were kicked and struck with the butts of rifles or with the fists. One was thrown into the Démer, but managed to escape, after having passed the night with only his head above the water. After the

<sup>1</sup> See the extract from this diary in J. Bédier, *Les crimes allemands d'après des témoignages allemands*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> See the deposition k2 of the report of the English commission (Evidence and Documents, p. 216). The presence of the Belgian soldiers with a machine gun is well proved by an article of *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, No. 291, 20th October 1914.

<sup>3</sup> 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, vol. ii. pp. 130-1); Evidence and Documents, depositions k54 and k65; Hervé de Gruben, *Les Allemands à Louvain*, pp. 20-1.

<sup>4</sup> 15<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, vol. ii. p. 23).

<sup>5</sup> 2<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, vol. i. p. 51); *Rapports*, vol. ii., annexe i., p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> 1<sup>er</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, vol. i. p. 44); 15<sup>e</sup> *Rapport* (*Rapports*, vol. ii. p. 26).

<sup>7</sup> See the list annexed to vol. ii. of *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, where will be found, in the case of every commune, the exact number of civilians killed and houses pillaged or burned.

shooting the Germans brought to the group of the survivors the Lieutenant Fauconnier and some of his men with their hands bound. At the moment when the prisoners were about to be led away four civilians, who had been hidden in a cave during the combat, were brought out and were immediately shot.<sup>1</sup>

Some wounded, lying defenceless on the ground where the combat took place, were killed with the butts of rifles. A shot was added to despatch them. This was only the beginning.

Towards nine in the morning the Germans made their entry into Aerschot. They were under the dominion of a fierce state of excitement. The losses which they had encountered during the combat had filled them with fury: their treatment of the prisoners proves it. Hardly had they entered the town when they began to behave with unheard of brutality. They immediately seized labourers who were going to their work and held them as hostages. They presented themselves at the convent of the Pères Picpus, which had been made into a regular ambulance of the Red Cross, where the wounded Belgians were placed. Although the principal entrance, over which the flag of the Geneva Convention floated, was open, the Germans broke open with axes the side entrances. With fixed bayonets, preceded by officers with revolvers in their hands, the soldiers invaded the ambulance, under the pretext that soldiers and officers were concealed there. The staff of the ambulance, with some civilians arrested outside, were ranged against the façade of the building to be shot. This order, however, was not executed, and the staff of the ambulance managed to escape, whilst the soldiers occupied the convent, firing at random. They made particular search for the parish priest, alleging that he had, during the fight, fired from the tower of the church.

Some German officers then ordered M. Tielemans, the burgomaster, to invite the people to deposit at the hôtel de ville any arms that they might have in their possession, and to inform them that all discovered bearing arms would be shot. The burgomaster had previously, by a public crier and by printed posters, addressed this request to his fellow-citizens, before the arrival of the enemy. So this request resulted in the acquisition of one fowling-piece for shooting pigeons.

The Germans then released the some two hundred hostages whom they had already taken, among whom were some sick men. In the course of the morning they had already burned several houses in the Rue du Marteau and shot six civilians whom they had driven from their houses.

The town was pillaged during the whole course of the day. Many shop-windows were broken and the shops themselves sacked. A great number of soldiers got drunk. Towards 4 p.m. there was a panic. Shots were fired in the Grand' Place, followed by an irregular fusillade. A German superior officer, Colonel Stenger, was struck by a ball and killed. Whilst the soldiers spread about the town, shooting into the houses and throwing incendiary grenades, the family of the burgo-

<sup>1</sup> 5<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, vol. i. pp. 64-5)*; 15<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (Rapports, vol. ii. pp. 28-9)*; 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (ibid., p. 130)*. Respecting the attacks on the members of the Red Cross and other offences of that kind, see Evidence and Documents, depositions h41 and h56, and the 7<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission, vol. i. p. 97*.

master was arrested and the burgomaster himself made responsible for the death of the German officer.

The Germans drove the people out of their houses into the streets, shot some in the open, and seized all the male inhabitants. They were conducted to a field on the road to Louvain and kept there, whilst the women, penned in the Place Publique, had to witness the ignition of the town. On the morrow the Germans placed the civilian prisoners in rows of three, and in each row took one of the three. These victims, chosen at hazard, were then conducted, with the burgomaster, his brother, and his son, aged fifteen and a half, to about 100 metres from the town and there shot. Civilians were compelled to dig a ditch and to bury the dead. Afterwards pillage and incendiarism still continued for many days, each newly arriving troop, reserve or Landsturm, venting its fury upon what remained of the condemned town. About one hundred and fifty inhabitants were killed, three hundred and eighty-six houses burned, and the whole town subjected to a frightful pillage.<sup>1</sup>

An American war correspondent, who was the first stranger to visit the locality after the sack, has described his impressions in the following terms:—

We were the first foreigners to see Aerschot after it had been sacked and burned by the Germans. . . . When we saw it, it was but a heap of smoking ruins, garrisoned by a battalion of German soldiers, and with a population consisting of half a hundred white-faced women. In many parts of the world I have seen many terrible and revolting things, but nothing so ghastly or horrifying as Aerschot. Quite two-thirds of the houses had been burned, and showed unmistakable signs of having been sacked by a maddened soldiery before they were burned. Everywhere were the ghastly evidences. Doors had been smashed in with rifle-butts and boot-heels; windows had been broken; furniture had been wantonly destroyed; pictures had been torn from the walls; mattresses had been ripped open with bayonets in search of valuables; drawers had been emptied upon the floors; the outer walls of the houses were spattered with blood and pock-marked with bullets; the side-walks were slippery with broken wine bottles; the streets were strewn with women's clothing. It needed no one to tell us the details of that orgy of blood and lust. The story was so plainly written that any one could read it.

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<sup>1</sup> The evidences respecting Aerschot are extremely numerous, and as a whole entirely consistent. See 1<sup>er</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. pp. 41-5)*; 4<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (Rapports, i. p. 53 et seq.)*; 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (Rapports, ii. p. 111 et seq.)*; pastoral letter of Cardinal Mercier; correspondence of Cardinal Mercier with the German authorities (*Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique, vol. ii. pp. 183-4*); *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, pp. 22-4*; Evidence and Documents, depositions c1 and following; H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne, p. 51* (names of victims); annexe i. of vol. ii. of *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*; L. H. Grondys, *Les Allemands en Belgique, pp. 16-28*; L. Van der Essen, *A Statement about the Destruction of Louvain and Neighbourhood, pp. 2-4, Chicago, 1915*; A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge, pp. 13-14, 40-1*.

See the photograph of the house of the burgomaster of Aerschot—riddled with shot; of the tomb where he was buried, with ninety-three other civilians, after the massacre; of a letter from his wife recounting the circumstances, in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne, p. 60*. See also the photographs taken by the American Powell in *Fighting in Flanders, New York, 1914, pp. 85, 86*.

A calm and impartial discussion of the accusations brought against the inhabitants of Aerschot by the German White Book will be found in E. Grimwood Mears' *The Destruction of Belgium, London, 1915, pp. 15-19*. See J. H. Morgan, *German Atrocities: An Official Investigation, London, 1916, pp. 14-15*; *Réponse au Livre blanc allemand, p. 147 et seq.*



For a mile we drove the car slowly between the blackened walls of fire-gutted buildings. This was no accidental conflagration, mind you, for scattered here and there were houses which stood undamaged, and in every such case there was scrawled with chalk upon their doors "*Gute Leute. Nicht zu plundern*" (Good people. Do not plunder). . . .

Despite the scowls of the soldiers, I attempted to talk with some of the women huddled in front of a bakery waiting for a distribution of bread, but the poor creatures were too terror-stricken to do more than stare at me with beseeching eyes. Those eyes will always haunt me; I wonder if they do not sometimes haunt the Germans.

But a little episode that occurred as we were leaving the city did more than anything else to bring home the horror of it all. We passed a little girl of nine or ten, and I stopped the car to ask the way. Instantly she held both hands above her head and began to scream for mercy. When we had given her some chocolate and money, and had assured her that we were not Germans, but Americans and friends, she ran like a frightened deer. That little child with her fright-wide eyes and her hands raised in supplication was in herself a terrible indictment of the Germans.<sup>1</sup>

It was not Aerschot alone that suffered during the 19th August, but also several villages in the neighbourhood—Rotselaer, Gelrode, Tremeloo. On entering Rotselaer the Germans led to the parsonage a certain number of the inhabitants of the village. The burgomaster was summoned. The parsonage was searched, and the church, the parish priest being led through the buildings, accompanied by an officer with a revolver in his hand, and four soldiers with fixed bayonets. On the same day, without any grounds, four or five inhabitants were taken away and shot. About twenty houses were burned. A German officer, addressing himself to a man whose house was on fire, compelled him, by threatening him with a revolver, to declare that the house had been set on fire by Belgians.<sup>2</sup>

At Gelrode twenty-five civilians were imprisoned in the church. Seven of them were taken away by a company of soldiers at the orders of an officer. They were searched, but no arms were found on them. As one of the prisoners escaped, the other six were immediately shot. The surviving inhabitants were compelled to dig graves for the victims. A woman who was thence returning home was killed by the Germans, who shot at her from a distance of 100 metres.<sup>3</sup>

At Tremeloo a skirmish took place between the Belgian rear-guard and the invaders at the moment of the retreat towards Antwerp. On entering the village the Germans set fire to thirty-seven houses and killed two civilians.<sup>4</sup> At Wespelaer, in the course of the retreat, several uhlans were killed by the Belgian rear-guard. On entering the village the Germans threatened to kill some of the inhabitants on the pretext that it was they who had shot at the uhlans. Happily it proved possible to convince the German officer that these soldiers had fallen in an engagement with the Belgians.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 85-8. There should be compared with this description the 4<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. p. 59 et seq.)*, the narrative of the Dutchman Grondys op. cit. p. 16 et seq., and Louise Creed's book, *A Woman's Experience of the Great War*, London, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> 1<sup>er</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. pp. 45-6)*; Evidence and Documents, depositions c48 to c52; A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, p. 24; Evidence and Documents, depositions c39 to c45.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence and Documents, depositions c53 to c55.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, deposition c60: L. Van der Essen, *A Statement about the Destruction of Louvain and Neighbourhood*, p. 4.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE ENTRY OF THE GERMANS INTO BRUSSELS

At the moment when it became evident, on the 17th August, that the waves of the great invasion were rolling in the direction of Brussels, the Queen and the Ministers left for Antwerp, the national retreat to which the Government was to retire in case of danger. The momentary anxiety occasioned by this departure was diminished by the reassuring proclamation which the Government issued before quitting the capital.\*

None the less, the evening of the 19th witnessed the arrival of long files of refugees, coming from Louvain and from places in its vicinity, mingled with groups of wounded soldiers who had not been able to follow the retreat on Antwerp.

We do not know whether, for an instant, any one had seriously dreamed of defending Brussels. Still, it is a fact that some 20,000 civic guards had been stationed in the neighbourhood of the city, that trenches had been dug, and barricades erected in many places. Howbeit, the moment arrived when the folly of defending Brussels with the troops of the civic guard became clear to the eyes of the responsible authorities—leaving out of consideration the question whether the Germans would not regard the citizen militia as nothing more than a mob of francs-tireurs, and treat it accordingly.

It was therefore decided not to defend Brussels, and the civic guard was recalled from the defensive positions which it was occupying, and trenches were filled up and barricades removed. The civic guard of the second line—those between thirty-two and forty years of age—were disarmed during the night of the 19th, and those of the first—between twenty and thirty-two—were sent to Ghent, with the idea of using their services elsewhere. Numerous trains removed the men in the direction of Termonde. The wireless telegraphic station near the King's palace, at Laeken, was blown up. The railway rolling-stock was sent in the directions of Lille and Antwerp. From that moment anguish took possession of every heart: the spirits of all were downcast, and indefinite fears filled the air. Few of the inhabitants of Brussels lay down to sleep that night, whilst awaiting the inevitable—the entry of the enemy into the capital.

On the 20th August, at six in the morning, the German cavalry appeared at Tervuren. The burgomaster Max presented himself to negotiate the conditions of the surrender of the city. He had had affixed on the walls of the capital a public announcement in which he said particularly, "So long as I remain alive and in liberty I shall protect with all my power the rights and dignities of my fellow-citizens."

\* Text in J. M. Kennedy, *The Campaign round Liège*, pp. 118-21.

Towards eleven in the morning a German officer, at the head of a detachment of hussars bearing white flags, presented himself at the Porte de Louvain. The burgomaster, accompanied by two sheriffs, there received the envoys. He was conducted into the presence of the superior officers commanding the army of occupation, at whose head was General Sixtus Von Arnim, previously commander of the 4th Corps in garrison at Magdeburg. The preliminaries of the occupation were discussed. In return for a free passage accorded to the army, and the placing of barrack accommodation for three thousand men at their disposition, the Germans promised to pay in cash for all requisitions, to guarantee the security of the inhabitants, to respect public and private property, and to leave the administration of the city in the hands of the municipality.

The burgomaster was warned that every act of hostility would be immediately punished.

About 2 p.m. the German army appeared on the Louvain road, some 40,000 men, who were to impress the public of Brussels with the formidable German war-machine.

These were fresh troops, who had not been hitherto in action, and they consisted of troops of all arms. There were to be seen Death's-head hussars and Zieten hussars, siege pieces, and a great number of motor machine guns. At certain places the men at a whistle-signal from the officers fell into parade step, the famous "goose-step," so dear to Frederick the Great.

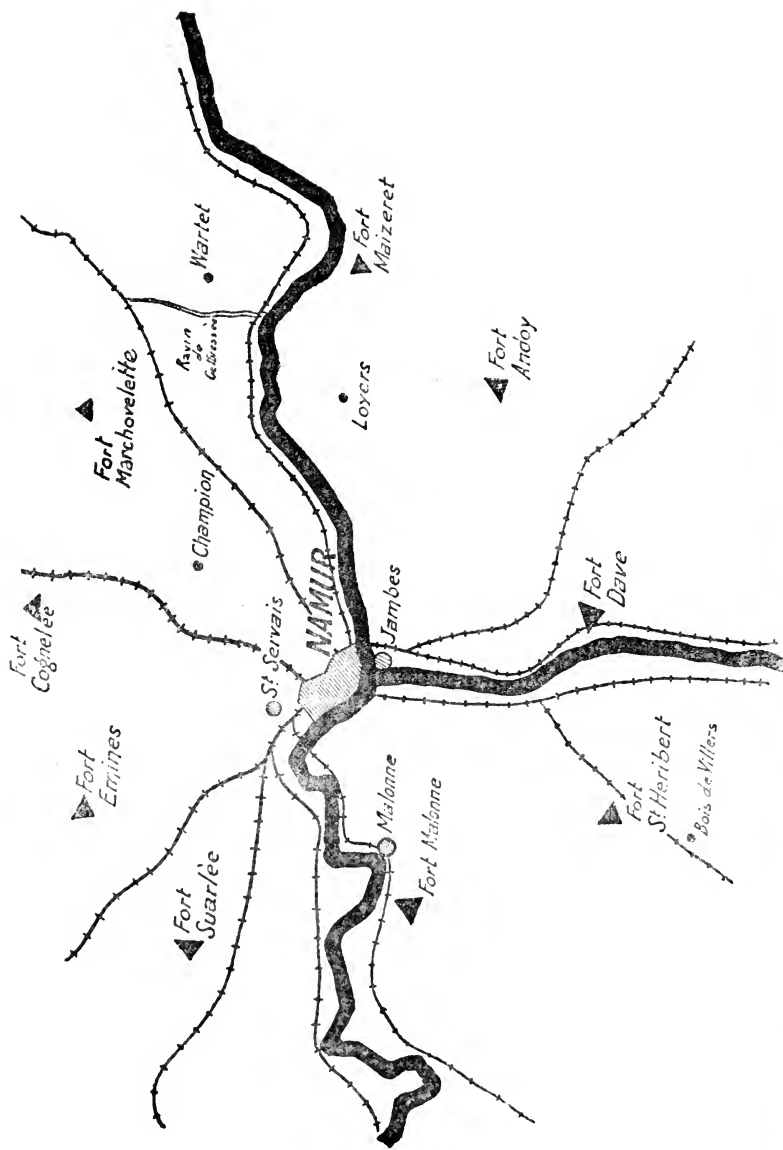
The firm attitude of the burgomaster had made an impression on his fellow-citizens. The crowd, obedient to the sage counsels which had been given it, witnessed the march-past of the invaders without any incidents taking place. Where there were any manifestations they were without consequences. Thus, at a certain place, an old woman, without any apparent aim, passed through the curious crowds towards the Germans. A policeman held her back. The old woman attempted to explain to him: "I had a son. *They* killed him!" "Well, then, and I," replied the police functionary in a hoarse voice, "have two sons in the army." Suddenly, as she was pushed back, the old woman cried, "Down with the Prussians!" The words produced a momentary panic: but the German soldiers passed by, looking, but seeming to see nothing.<sup>1</sup>

On arriving at the hôtel de ville the German commander left flying the Belgian flag, but ordered those of the Allies to be removed. He announced that the city of Brussels would be expected to pay a heavy war indemnity.

The occupation of Brussels with a large military force did not last long. Against the garrison that remained there the population of Brussels was about to undertake a contest without quarter, a peaceful strife, but one not on that account less effective. Contempt and the wit of the "Uilenspiegel" were their arms.<sup>2</sup> They made the conqueror understand that there are imponderable things that are mightier than brute force and Krupp mortars; the spirit of the old Flemish communes which woke again to life at contact with a foreign domination.

<sup>1</sup> L. H. Grondys, *Les Allemands en Belgique*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Buchan, *op. cit.* pp. 160-2; E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, pp. 87-104; L. H. Grondys, *op. cit.* pp. 7-10; M. des Ombiaux, *La résistance de la Belgique envahie*, pp. 22-9, Paris, 1916.



THE FORTS AT NAMUR.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SIEGE AND CAPTURE OF NAMUR.\*

WHILST the 1st German Army, under the command of Von Kluck, advanced in a north-westerly direction, against the defensive lines on the Gette, a part of this army simultaneously threatening an enveloping movement between the Grande Nèthe and the Démer, the 2nd German Army, under the command of General Von Bülow, slowly advanced up the valley of the Meuse, in the direction of Namur.

On entering Belgium the army of Von Bülow distributed the following proclamation:—

#### TO THE BELGIAN PEOPLE!

We have been compelled to enter Belgian territory to safeguard the interests of our national defence.

We are fighting the Belgian army solely in order to open a way into France, which your Government have wrongly denied us, although it has tolerated military reconnoitring on the part of France: a fact of which your newspapers have kept you in ignorance.

The peaceful population of Belgium is not our enemy; on the contrary, we shall treat them with consideration and benevolence, provided they give by their actions evidence of their peaceful sentiments.

But we shall act with severity against any attempt of the Belgian population to oppose any resistance to the German troops, or to injure our military interests.

Given at Montjoie, 9th August 1914.

The General Commanding in Chief of the 2nd Army,  
VON BÜLOW.†

The 2nd German Army was advancing to attack the fortified position of Namur. Belgium had, in effect, pledged herself to defend her fortified places, and Namur constituted a *point d'appui* for the defence of the line of the Meuse from Namur to Givet. At Namur had been detached the 4th Division of the army, which counted 18,500 rifles—four mixed brigades—500 sabres, 60 guns, and 24 machine guns. At the moment of the enemy's arrival, one of the brigades of the division—the 15th—was lacking. It had been sent to the assistance of Liège, and had retired with the 3rd Division of the army upon the Gette after the evacuation of the city of Liège. To the thus diminished forces of the 4th Division were to be added the garrison of the fortress, so that the whole number of troops at the disposition of General Michel, Governor of the place, may be estimated at 24,000 men.

The fortified position of Namur had been constructed in accordance with the plans of Brialmont, inspired by principles applied at Liège.

\* For this chapter see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 33-4; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 55-6.

† 6° *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. pp. 78-9).*

The defence consisted of nine forts with movable cupolas, counting altogether some 350 pieces of ordnance.<sup>1</sup> On the north the fort of Cognelée defended the line of the Namur-Brussels railway. Between Cognelée and the Meuse was the fort of Marchovelette. In the south-east angle, formed by the Meuse and the Sambre, were the three forts of Maizeret, of Andoy, and of Dave. In the south-west angle the region was defended by the forts of Malonne and of St.-Heribert. Finally, on the north of the Sambre, between this river and Cognelée, the circle was completed by the forts of Suarlée and of Emines.

The number of the garrison being scarcely sufficient to hold the place itself, the defence of the line of the Meuse from Namur to Givet was left to the French army which was concentrating in this region. This was the 5th French Army, which had marched on Belgium the moment after the neutrality of Belgium was violated. It occupied the left bank of the Meuse, with the troops of the 1st Corps (afterwards replaced by the 51st Division of reserve) from Hastière to the position of Namur. These troops occupied the left bank, being entrusted with the task "of preventing the enemy from gaining access to this bank above Namur, but without being responsible for any action on the right bank." Circumstances, however, led the French commandant to throw some fractions of his forces across to the right bank, notably at Hastière-par-delà, Anseremme, and at Dinant itself. There were also posts at Bouvignes and at Waulsort.<sup>2</sup>

Some other troops of the same French army covered the position of Namur on the west, holding the bridges of the Sambre from Floreffe to Tamines.

Whilst the army of Von Bülow was advancing against Namur by the valley of the Meuse, a third army, composed principally of Saxon troops, was marching across the Belgian Ardennes on Dinant, passing through Laroche, Marche, and Achène. It was commanded by General Von Hausen, a man of sixty-eight, who had made his *début* at Sadowa. This army contained two Saxon corps, the 11th Corps of reserve and a portion of cavalry of the Guard.<sup>3</sup> Its function was to force the passage of the Meuse south of Namur.

Thanks to the resistance of the forts of Liège, the garrison of Namur profited by a considerable delay. The armies of Von Bülow and Von Hausen advanced only slowly. From the 5th August patrols of the enemy's cavalry made their appearance in the Condroz, and skirmishes took place at Hovelange and at Sorée. On the 6th August the French cavalry corps of General Sordet temporarily swept the region clean. The first contacts took place in Hesbaye on the 7th August. Afterwards they became more frequent, giving evidence of the approach of cavalry continuously more and more numerous. We have spoken above of the engagement at Eghezée-Boneffe. In the greater part of these skirmishes the Germans offered little resistance.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* i. p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> These particulars, furnished by the French military authorities, are given by Note No. 128 of the *Bureau documentaire belge* (Belgian Documentary Bureau), entitled *Le livre blanc allemand et les atrocités allemandes à Dinant* (The German White Book and the German atrocities at Dinant).

<sup>3</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* i. p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 55-6.

On Wednesday the 12th August, however, the forces of Von Bülow arrived at Huy. The 8th mixed Belgian brigade, which was detached there, fearing that it might be surrounded, withdrew towards Namur, after having exchanged some shots with the enemy and having destroyed the bridges over the river.<sup>1</sup> It proceeded to occupy Andenne.

But the movement of the German masses became daily more marked on both sides of the Meuse, and particularly on the right bank. On the 15th August, when the fall of the fort of Loncin permitted the army of Von Kluck to begin its forward movement, and placed in the hands of Von Bülow and Von Hausen the railway connection with Liège, the vanguard of Von Hausen attempted a *coup de main* on Dinant.<sup>2</sup>

German patrols had already appeared at Dinant before this attack by the enemy in force. Thus, on the 6th August, Belgian engineers dispersed a patrol of hussars at Anseremme. On the same or the next day, Belgian carabinieri killed a hussar and made another prisoner. On the 12th at "Les Rivages" (Dinant) a detachment of French infantry destroyed a cavalry patrol. About the same date shots were fired at the "Fonds de Leffe" by a detachment of the same regiment. Two German cavalry soldiers were killed.<sup>3</sup>

On the 15th August, in the morning, some cavalry troops belonging to the 3rd and 4th Divisions of the German cavalry and two battalions of Saxon chasseurs attempted to take Dinant. They were supported by strong artillery. The French had, on the right bank, a half-battalion of the 148th, a battalion of the 33rd, and a section of machine guns. These troops held the citadel and the exits from Dinant towards the suburbs of St.-Nicolas and of Leffe. The main body of the French infantry had its units on the left bank. The engagement began with a violent bombardment, which extended also to the left bank. Under the cover of this fire the German infantry advanced against the French who occupied the heights and the citadel. The French had no artillery when the action began. In consequence the detachment of the 33rd was driven from the citadel; it retired, by the bridge of the Meuse, to the left bank about midday. Some fractions of the two battalions of Saxon chasseurs crossed the bridge in pursuit, but were received with a violent fire directed upon them by troops who held the left bank. Meanwhile, from the cliffs of the right bank and from the citadel the Germans poured on the troops defending the extremity of the bridge a hail of fire from their machine guns. The French retired to the heights behind the town, temporarily evacuating the latter. The German flag was hoisted on the citadel.

French reinforcements soon arrived, and towards 2 p.m. the characteristic detonations of the French artillery were heard. Whilst the 8th and 73rd infantry began a vigorous counter-attack to recover the ground lost on the left bank, the French batteries concentrated

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 33-4; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 56; E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, p. 61; J. Buchan, op. cit. i. p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Respecting the engagement at Dinant, see the information given by the French military commandant, in the Note 128 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*; J. Buchan, op. cit. i. pp. 165-6; E. Dane, op. cit. pp. 71-3; J. M. Kennedy, *The Campaign round Liège*, pp. 126-31. Compare the narrative of Fleury-Ramure, *Charleroi*, Paris, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Procureur du Roi at Dinant, M. P. Tschoffen, inserted in the 20<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, ii. p. 86).

their fire on the citadel. One of the first shells cut the staff of the German flag. In the course of the afternoon the reinforcing troops vigorously drove the Saxons back beyond the Meuse, crossed the bridge, and retook the citadel about 5 p.m. The artillery duel continued, and the shells crossed each other above Dinant, whilst the German infantry evacuated the heights. A squadron of the 8th French mounted chasseurs followed the enemy in retreat on the right bank. Night put an end to the combat and to the pursuit of the Germans. The 8th and 73rd then returned to the left bank, contenting themselves with occupying the bridge and the adjoining houses. The two sections of the 148th, which had maintained their positions and had remained isolated in the suburbs of Leffe and St.-Nicolas, also recrossed the river and joined their regiment on the left bank.

Anseremme, south of Dinant, had been attacked at the same time as the latter town, but the enemy did not cross the Meuse. He contented himself with pushing back the advanced French posts, which successfully defended the approaches to the bridge and to the railway station.

Dinant did not suffer much from the combat. A civilian was killed and a woman wounded. Some houses only on the left bank were struck by German bombs. From the beginning of the action the German artillery fired on the hospital, although it was well in view and protected by the Red Cross flag. Six projectiles struck the buildings; one of them penetrated the chapel at the moment when the orphans were coming out after Mass, and nearly occasioned a massacre.<sup>1</sup>

The troops of Von Hausen, having failed in their *coup de main*, retired upon the main body of the army. The French on their part limited themselves to sending out some patrols on the right bank. From the 16th August they strongly organized the defence on the left bank, at Dinant, at Anseremme, at Hastière, at Bouvignes, and at Houx. Elements of trenches only, barbed-wire entanglements, and barricades of paving-stones were constructed on the right bank at the various places where the Meuse might be crossed.

From the 15th to the 22nd August there were only insignificant skirmishes on this front, shots being exchanged between the Germans, who lined the crests of the hills on the right bank, and the French patrols. Some German detachments conveyed in machine gun motors sometimes descended towards Leffe or other groups of houses. One of these detachments sacked the village of Houx, and set it on fire on the two following nights. Three well-known inhabitants were hanged in the servants' hall of one of the principal houses.<sup>2</sup>

As for Namur, the operations directed against the city were limited to two raids of flying-machines which dropped bombs on the town.<sup>3</sup> On the 19th August indications of an imminent attack became more significant and more menacing. On that day troops of all arms were signalled in the circumjacent localities, towards Faulx, as well as

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Procureur du Roi at Dinant, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Data furnished by the French military commandant (see note No. 128 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*).

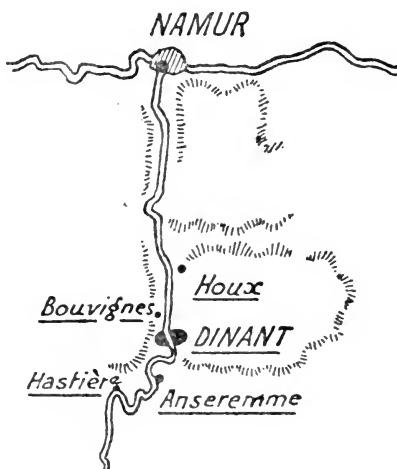
<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 56; Geoffrey Young, *From the Trenches*, pp. 65, 72-3.



towards Ramillies-Offus, where were assembled several regiments of infantry and cavalry.<sup>1</sup>

It will be remembered that on the same day the forces of Von Kluck (1st Army) had forced the line of the Gette, entered Louvain, and pressed on towards Brussels. The army of Von Bülow advanced on the left of the 1st Army, and began to surround Namur. In this way the immense mass of the invading army was about to sweep central Belgium, to turn upon Namur as a pivot, and to fall upon the front of the Allies posted along the Sambre and from Condé to Mons.

The troops which were signalled in the vicinity of Namur were accompanied by pieces of ordnance of very great weight. These were no doubt elements of the siege plant which had been rendered available by the fall of the last forts of Liège.<sup>2</sup> Behind them were about to be brought up the famous Austrian mortars of 30·5 cm. and of 42 cm.



The presence of the Austrian mortars is a veritable surprise. Those batteries, coming from different directions, had been concentrated at Cologne on the 15th August. Their commandant had orders to depart on the night of the 15th-16th. The mortars travelled by way of Verviers, and were detained at that town. On the 21st they set out on their march towards Namur.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 57; *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> These details are borrowed from an interview with Colonel Albert Langer, commandant of the batteries in question, published in the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna, No. 18136, 18th February 1915, p. 13. See the translation of the interview in the note No. 35 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*, under the title *Honnêteté autrichienne*. See on this same subject the note No. 87 of the same collection (*Les violations du droit des gens dans les rapports entre l'Autriche-Hongrie et la Belgique*), and the documents Nos. 104-5 of the Second Belgian Grey Book (pp. 107-9). See in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 20, the reproduction of a poster placarded at Brussels by the German military government, in which the Austrian assistance before Namur is recognized. See also the piteous explanation of the Austro-Hungarian Government in the Second Belgian Grey Book, No. 105 (annexe), p. 108.

The employment of these monstrous pieces against the forts of Namur constitutes a cynical violation of the Law of Nations, for Austria-Hungary did not declare war on Belgium until the 28th August, and until that day the Austrian Minister was residing at Brussels.

It is not possible to lay too great emphasis on the presence of this heavy artillery during the operations at Namur, for it explains the rapid fall of the place, as we shall see later.

Before the beginning of the siege of Namur the Germans were guilty of one of those destructions of towns by means of which they imagined it possible to break the Belgian resistance. The Belgian 8th mixed brigade had retired, as we have said, from Huy to Andenne. At dawn on the 19th August the brigade came into contact with the Germans on the left bank of the Meuse and on the heights of Seilles, opposite Andenne. After an engagement which lasted until nearly eight o'clock in the morning, the Belgians, fearing to be cut off from Namur, retired on the forts of Marchovelette and of Maizeret, not without having destroyed the bridge which united Seilles and Andenne and the tunnel of the railway at Seilles itself.<sup>2</sup> Towards ten o'clock in the morning the advance guard of the German troops<sup>3</sup> arrived at Andenne. Having marched along the right bank of the river, they intended to cross to the left bank at this place. The ten or twelve uhlans who were acting as scouts went straight to the bridge, and ascertained that it had been destroyed. They withdrew, no doubt to announce the bad news to the commandant of the column. Soon afterwards they returned, seized the burgomaster, an old man of seventy, and forced him, by brutal usage, to surrender the communal cash-box.

The main body of the troops arrived at Andenne in the afternoon. The soldiers spread about the town and in the neighbourhood, whilst awaiting the completion of a bridge of boats, the construction of which was not completed until the morrow. Until the evening the relations between the inhabitants and the troops were good. At the end of the evening, after having frequented the cafés, the soldiers refused to pay for their drinks. Nevertheless the night was calm. On the 20th August in the morning the bridge was finished, and the soldiers began to defile through the streets to pass to the left bank of the Meuse. From the interior of their houses the inhabitants watched them passing. At a given moment a sort of hesitation became apparent. A command seemed to circulate through the ranks and the soldiers placed their rifles beneath their arms. Suddenly some shots rang out on the opposite bank of the Meuse, at Seilles, followed by a heavy fire. Immediately the troops which, at Andenne, were marching towards the bridge fired in their turn, in the direction of the opposite bank. A

<sup>1</sup> See the text of the declaration of war, sent and dated at The Hague, 28th August, by the Count Clary, in the First Belgian Grey Book, No. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence and Documents, deposition b2; *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 34; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Respecting the atrocities at Andenne see the 11<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, i. pp. 137-41); the 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport* (*Rapports*, ii. pp. 123-5); *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, pp. 15-16; Evidence and Documents, depositions b1 to b4. Photographs of the corpses of the victims will be found in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 64. Full reports in *Réponse au Livre blanc allemand*, pp. 179-98 and 464-8.

veritable panic took possession of the soldiers, and there were to be heard bugle-calls, orders of the officers rallying their men, and teams galloping in the streets. The men fired at random in all directions, aiming at the doors and windows of the houses. Machine guns were brought into action, and turned their fire on the town.

A certain number of the inhabitants at the first sound of firing sought refuge in their cellars, or took flight by the gardens. A certain number of others were killed by the firing or by the soldiers who penetrated into the houses. The sack and pillage of the principal streets of Andenne began immediately. When the firing slackened, about 7 p.m., a large number of the inhabitants fled in the direction of the quarries. At this moment all the quarter of the railway station was in flames, and the houses were burning for a distance of 2 kilometres in the direction of the hamlet of Tramaka. The small farms on the heights were also in flames. During the night the firing recommenced at intervals.

On the morrow, at four o'clock in the morning, the whole population of Andenne were driven out of their houses. Men, women, children, sick folk, and aged, with their hands raised in the air, were driven to the Place des Tilleuls; while those who did not understand the orders (which were given them in German) and those who attempted to escape were slaughtered. At the Place des Tilleuls the men were separated from the women. All were searched; no arms were found. On divers pretexts three men were shot, and a fourth killed by a bayonet wound. At the orders of a colonel (who had, at first, talked of having every one shot, but abandoned the idea at the prayers of a German girl temporarily residing at Andenne) fifty men were selected at hazard and shot on the banks of the Meuse and near the Gendarmerie.

During this time other groups of soldiers continued to massacre in the neighbourhood. All the witnesses agree in singling out the ferocity of a tall red-haired soldier, whose face was scarred with a wound, who alone killed eight persons in a meadow.

Towards ten o'clock in the morning the women were sent away with an order to gather up the dead and to efface the puddles of blood in the streets and in the houses. Afterwards the surviving men, about 500, were imprisoned as hostages in three small houses situated near the bridge. They were not finally released until the following Tuesday, after they had been also placed on the bridge as a shield against the fire of the forts of Namur.

Whilst these incidents were passing at Andenne, on the other side of the river, at Seilles, the German troops killed forty of the inhabitants and burned 128 houses. At 8 a.m. on the 20th, after having crossed the bridge of boats, they had begun firing at random, thus possibly occasioning the answer of those who had remained at Andenne, and the massacre in the latter locality.

Up to the present it has not been possible to ascertain the figures of the butchery. A first list gives 103 corpses exhumed and identified,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See this list in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 63. In the course of a pseudo-enquiry made at Andenne by the Germans, the burgomaster tendered a list of the victims. Respecting this list the German Lieutenant Goetze remarks, "An examination of this list shows that it is possible to assert certainly in the case of

amongst whom are several priests, women, and children. The dead at Seilles are not included in this number.

The officer who committed these horrors was publicly sheltered by the authority of General Von Bülow himself, who, on the 22nd August, announced by placards to the population of Liège: "It is with my consent that the General-in-chief has had the whole locality burned, and that about a hundred persons have been shot."

Von Bülow announced in this placard that the inhabitants of Andenne attacked the troops.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to find a shadow of proof of this accusation.<sup>2</sup> It looks very much as if the military check occasioned by the destruction of the bridge across the Meuse caused the terrible vengeance of the enemy. Have we not irrefutable evidence that Creil, in France, was destroyed on the 1st September 1914 for the same reason?<sup>3</sup>

The massacres at Andenne were principally the work of the 28th Regiment of Pioneers, under the directions of Colonel Scheunemann.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst Scheunemann's Germans were operating at Andenne, the large siege pieces arrived before Namur and, as soon as possible, were placed in position. On the 20th August, beginning in the morning, the Germans commenced with driving in the outposts of the section north-east of the fortress. These attacks were sharply pressed by dismounted cavalry and infantry, supported by machine guns and a numerous artillery. Soon, the fire having begun, the garrison of Namur discerned the enemy's batteries before the forts of Maizeret, of Andoy, and of Dave. The batteries were immediately cannonaded.<sup>5</sup> The

196 persons only that they were shot: 28 have simply disappeared." Here we have a German admission, attesting that at least 196 persons were shot. See E. Grimwood Mears, *The Destruction of Belgium*, p. 21.

<sup>1</sup> See the text of this proclamation in the 6<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. p. 30)* and the photographic reproduction in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> This is the conclusion arrived at by the members of the Belgian Commission of Enquiry and by the British Commission. Respecting the value of the German accusations, see the discussion of E. Grimwood Mears, *The Destruction of Belgium*, pp. 19-23; J. H. Morgan, *German Atrocities. An Official Investigation*, p. 11. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* of the 8th September 1914, having published a narrative by Dr. Alex. Berg, according to which the parish priest of Andenne had, by means of a handbell, given the signal for an attack on the German troops, the German Bureau of Catholic Defence *Pax* addressed itself to the military authority at Andenne, asking whether this narrative was correct. On the 8th December 1914, Lieutenant-Colonel Von Eulwege wrote from Namur the following letter: "My personal investigations, which have been very precise among a number of people, have not elicited any proof that the parish priest of Andenne excited the population to a combat in the street. At Andenne every one tells you a different story about the events of the 20th August last. That is quite natural. The greater part of the people saw but little of the actual combat, as fear had led them to hide in their cellars." See B. Duhr, *Der Lügegeist im Völkerkrieg*, Munich and Ratisbonne, 1915, pp. 61-3. Would it be possible to desire a better refutation of the story of the treacherous attack made by the population of Andenne?

<sup>3</sup> Diary of a soldier of the 32nd Regiment of Infantry Reserve, 4th Corps of Reserve: "1. 9. Creil. Die Brücke (eiserne) gesprengt, dafür Strassen in Brand gesteckt, Civilisten erschossen" (The bridge (iron) blown up. For this streets set on fire, civilians shot). See the text and the photograph in *Les violations des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne*, i. No. 42, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 34; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 57.

same night three attacks were essayed by the enemy's infantry in the gaps of the fort of Marchevelette.

These attacks were probably launched only with the intention of testing the solidity of the defence. If the defenders for a moment supposed that Von Bülow was about to repeat the blunders of Von Emmich before Liège they were mistaken. The enemy now had with him his monstrous siege guns. He had ascertained the effect of some of them at Liège. Far from sacrificing his infantry, he was about to subject the forts of Namur to a terrific bombardment, and to reduce the troops that guarded the intervals to complete impotence.

The bombardment of Namur began on the 21st August at 10 o'clock in the morning. The howitzers and mortars of 28 cm., the 30·5 Austrian pieces, and even pieces of 42 cm.<sup>1</sup> were employed. They directed their fire on the forts. The heavy field artillery had for objective the trenches and the *points d'appui* of the intervals. The cannons of 15 cm. fired on the town itself, and bombarded it for four hours, without doubt with the intention of frightening the civil population and thus weakening the defence.

The bombardment of the siege guns was simultaneously turned on the forts of Andoy, of Maizeret, of Marchevelette, and of Cognelée, and from the outset had an extremely violent character. Every thirty seconds giant projectiles struck the cupolas and the observation towers.

At nightfall, advantage was taken of some respite in the cannonade to make a serious inspection of the forts. Great damage had been done. Some two thousand projectiles had fallen on the fort of Maizeret, but it was ascertained with satisfaction that the cupolas were still intact. At Andoy the situation was more critical: fragments of concrete had jammed several cupolas. The magazines of the fort had been crushed, and in part destroyed. Marchevelette had suffered most of all; the cupola of the howitzer of 21 cm. was destroyed; that also of the 15 cm. was useless. Only the pieces of smaller calibre, in the cupolas of the 12 cm. and of the 5·7 cm., were still serviceable. On the other hand, the fort of Cognelée had suffered only insignificant damage.

In the first three forts the telephonic installations were destroyed. In consequence, the reply of the Belgian pieces became extremely difficult, apart from the fact of their relative ignorance of their precise relation to the localities of the besieging batteries. As for the infantry troops which garrisoned the connecting works between the forts, although they themselves were exposed to a fire less murderous than that of the siege guns, the bombardment of the heavy artillery was sufficient to produce disorder in the ranks of certain units. But they recovered themselves, resumed the places which they had temporarily abandoned, and conducted themselves bravely and stoically under the hail of shrapnel and shells. To hold their ground was all that they could do. They did not, like their comrades at Liège, enjoy the satisfaction of mowing down, by the fire of their rifles and machine guns,

<sup>1</sup> This is what Colonel Langer, commandant of the Austrian pieces, asserts in his interview to which allusion has been already made. See Note 32 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*. It was against the fort of Marchevelette that the shells of the pieces of 42 cm. were directed, if Langer is to be believed. It was, in fact, this fort which was first destroyed,

compact masses of their assailants. During the bombardment the German infantry did not move. It was sufficient to crush Namur by the giant projectiles of the siege guns.

It is possible to imagine what was the state of mind of the soldiers defending the gaps from the narrative of a soldier of the 10th of the Line<sup>1</sup> who took part in the action—if one can understand by “action” allowing oneself to be killed by shells without being able to reply.

The 10th of the Line was charged with the defence of the sector comprised between the fort of Marchevette and the Meuse, a line of about 3½ kilometres, situated on a height, 7 kilometres from the centre of Namur.

It was on the 20th August, says the narrative to which we refer, at eight o'clock in the morning, that our outposts were attacked near the château of Franc-Waret. They lost some thirty men, and fell back upon the main body. The colonel was not satisfied . . . and so in the evening our outposts had resumed their positions. All the same they had been compelled to fall back finally during the night: against forces such as those that were falling upon us nothing could be done.

In the morning of the 21st we were all in our lines, awaiting the German infantry: it would have been well received! It did not arrive. What did arrive was a storm of shell, of 150 and 77. The Boches were demolishing our trenches, destroying them, burying us in them; at the same time they cut off our retreat by dropping shrapnel behind us.

It is necessary to have lived in these torments to form an idea of them! At the beginning of the war we all dreamed of heroic charges with the bayonet, of positions taken by irresistible assaults to a cry of “*Vive le Roi!*” . . . And now we found ourselves obliged to hide ourselves at the bottom of a hole like moles, and without having seen a single enemy, were forced to swallow either earth or steel. . . . The bombardment of our trenches lasted eight hours, from ten in the morning till six in the afternoon. Then it was the trenches of the other sector, the sector of Champion, which the enemy cannonaded during the night.

So, to escape from this terrible situation, the garrison on the next day, the 22nd August, made some thrusts forwards towards the lines of the assailants. Everywhere the Belgians were received with a hellish fire—rifles and machine guns.

During this time the bombardment continued with unabated violence. It now enveloped the fort of Dave also in the southern sector. In the rear of the fort of Maizeret the line of defence towards Loyers was almost rendered untenable by the fact that the German long-range batteries installed on the north (left) bank of the Meuse enfiladed and commanded the rear of the soldiers posted there. The men of the 33rd strengthened their trenches as well as they could and remained at their post, furious at being able to do nothing and at seeing the heaps of dead and wounded gradually fill up their positions.

Suddenly, about ten o'clock, joyous cries rang out, “The French are there! The French are there!” In fact, two battalions of the French 45th and one of the 148th had just come to the assistance of the garrison. The Belgians were unable to restrain their joy at seeing the red pantaloons; men embraced each other in the trenches. It was then resolved to attempt an attack upon the enemy's artillery, which was signalled at Wartet. Two battalions of the 10th Belgian and the 46th French (the latter under the command of Commandant Janson) issued from the lines, supported by Belgian batteries of 7·5 cm. The

<sup>1</sup> “Le 10<sup>e</sup> de Ligne au siège de Namur” in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 22–23 August 1915.

troops deployed in skirmishing order, the French leading. They succeeded in surmounting, under fire, the ravine of Gelbressée and the woods beyond. As soon, however, as they debouched on open ground their attack was broken by a hail of shrapnel and of balls from machine guns fired at a short distance. The Belgian guns were silenced. They no longer existed. One of them had been completely overturned by a 23-cm. shell. The others were demolished. The rocky character of the plateau of Wartet prevented the troops from entrenching on their new positions. In a few minutes the French had lost a sixth of their effectives and the Belgians an eighth, and not an enemy was to be seen: they were all hidden. Nothing remained but to retire, under the hail of shrapnel, leaving on the field a great number of officers, among whom were Captain Henrotin, Lieutenant Cotton, and Sub-Lieutenant Morel. Belgians and French returned to their lines raving, and dying of thirst. It was only at midnight that a ration of water was distributed to them from Namur.

During this sortie the German 15-cm. guns had again bombarded the town.<sup>1</sup>

When the second evening of the siege arrived, the fort of Dave had not suffered any important damage; that of Andoy, already seriously injured the day before, continued to fire, notwithstanding its condition; that of Maizeret, on the contrary, was completely destroyed and had been evacuated. On the enormous masses of the broken concrete the German bombs continued to fall inexorably. At Marchovelette the last cupola had been rendered useless and the fort itself was crumbling. The garrison, sheltered under the casemates still accessible, continued to await an infantry assault which was never to arrive. Finally, the fort of Cognelée had passed through this second day of bombardment with the same success as the first; it still fired all its pieces. The bombardment continued during the night of the 22nd-23rd August. The soldiers who garrisoned the gaps were so fatigued that they slept in spite of the storm of fire. Those only awoke who were struck by the explosion of a shell.

During the bombardment of the 22nd the Germans compelled the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Namur to dig trenches under the fire of the forts; this was notably the case at Warisoul and at Bierwart.<sup>2</sup>

At dawn on the 23rd August the fire of the heavy artillery increased towards Cognelée, raising an anticipation of the infantry attack which had been so impatiently awaited. The Germans soon charged to the assault of the fort, but they were repulsed. Still, the electric installations of Cognelée were destroyed. About ten o'clock a projectile pierced the cupola of the 15-cm. and its explosion extinguished the auxiliary petroleum lighting, by means of which the artillery were working their pieces. A rush was made to pick up the men wounded by the explosion, when another projectile crushed the vault of the central gallery, sowing death among the men who were there. In these conditions the defence became impossible. Towards noon another infantry attack allowed the Germans to make themselves masters of the ruins of the fort. At the fort of Marchovelette the

<sup>1</sup> Respecting this sortie see *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 59-60; and "Le 10<sup>e</sup> de Ligne au siège de Namur," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> See the 7<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. p. 102)*.

central block, being cracked, permitted the deleterious gases and the flames of the projectiles which burst on the ruins to enter the fort. In spite of these horrible conditions the fort remained occupied until the moment when, about 1 p.m., it blew up. From that moment, from Cognelée to Andoy, the permanent works and the connecting trenches were pounded without the garrisons having the chance of firing a cartridge.

In addition, about 9 a.m. the 10th of the Line, defending the sector between Marchovelette and the Meuse, had already seen debouching on its left, between the fort and Champion, German masses who had probably succeeded in piercing the gap Cognelée-Marchovelette. Other masses emerged from the wood of Champion. The enemy was about to try to cut off the retreat upon Namur and to throw the Belgians into the Meuse. The 10th thereupon withdrew in the direction of the town, whilst a French battalion covered its retreat.

The same movement was executed by all the troops that garrisoned the sectors of the north-east and south-east. In that space the field batteries alone still exerted themselves to reply to the enemy's fire: poor little angry guns, they were not able to hold out long and were either reduced to silence or annihilated. Towards noon, having reduced the forts of the north-east and of the south-east, the siege artillery lengthened its range and began the bombardment of the forts of Emynes and Suarlée. In this latter fort the kitchens and the bakery were destroyed by the first shots. By the side of the Meuse German detachments were already advancing upon Namur, compelling women and children to precede them.<sup>1</sup>

At this moment the situation was extremely critical. The fall of Namur was a mere question of hours; its part was finished. Since the 19th, when the line of the Gette was broken by the troops of Von Kluck, Namur had lost its value as a *point d'appui* for the army in the field. And now news reached General Michel proving that the rôle of the fortress as a *point d'appui* for the Allies occupying the Sambre had also come to a close. The passages of this river had been forced between Namur and Charleroi. Finally, the Saxon army of Von Hausen had crossed the Meuse at Dinant.<sup>2</sup>

The situation of the 4th Division of the army was terrible: its retreat was threatened with being cut off in the south by the Saxons, and its flanks with being exposed to simultaneous attack from the east and from the west. To conclude, the troops which had just forced the lines on the north between Cognelée and the Meuse were advancing in the rear.

Thenceforth the retreat became a *saufe qui peut*. The soldiers of the 8th, 10th, and 13th Brigades got away as they could. The retreat of the 10th of the Line, under Colonel Verbist, was marked by moving incidents. When the regiment arrived at the entry of Namur, after having evacuated the sector Marchovelette-Meuse, the colonel halted his men. "My friends," he said, "smart bearing whilst crossing the city! Pay attention to your dressing! You know that I attach importance to it." In spite of their fatigue the men braced themselves up. As it debouched on the Place d'Armes, the regiment passed the

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> For these events see the following chapter.



French battalion of the 45th which had protected its retreat, and then itself retreated by another route. The Belgians immediately readjusted their haversacks by a movement of their shoulders, dressed their line, and defiled with flashing eyes before the French while the shells were falling on the town. "When the two commanders [Belgian and French] had saluted each other with their swords," says an eye-witness, "it did not matter whether one was dirtier than beasts, in greatcoats of a colour that has no name; the people of Namur have not often witnessed so smart a march past!"

After having halted for some time at St.-Servais, the regiment reached Malonne, there crossed the Sambre, and at 11 p.m. reached Bois-de-Villers. There the Germans had already "been in action." The villages and the whole country were flaming like torches in the night. On the morrow, the 24th August, at ten o'clock in the morning the men approached the Abbey of Maredsous, when they were received by fire from a wood in front of them. Their retreat was cut. The colonel assembled his men. "Soldiers," he said to them, "you are free. I for my part am going straight forward with my officers. I shall not look behind me. Those of you who slip off—I shall not see. But those of you who follow me I swear to lead into France." Whereupon he went forward, with his revolver in his hand. Every one of his men followed him. The enemy who occupied the wood, some fifty uhlands, took flight at a gallop. Shortly afterwards the remains of the 10th of the Line entered France.<sup>1</sup>

In general the Belgian troops, in company with French detachments, withdrew by the Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse. The soldiers of the 8th and of the 13th Brigade had to cut their way through the enemy at Bois-de-Villers,<sup>2</sup> but towards midnight the main body of the troops was able to bivouac between Bioulx and Arbre. There they were menaced in the rear and on the flank, but managed to disengage themselves. The rear-guard alone was surrounded and taken prisoners at Ermeton-sur-Biert.<sup>3</sup> As for the transport corps, it withdrew on Bioulx, where it fell full upon the Germans setting fire to the village. A struggle ensued, in the course of which the Belgians were worsted. Almost the whole of the transport corps fell into the hands of the enemy.<sup>4</sup>

Altogether 12,000 men of the Belgian troops were able to reach Mariembourg and France. They embarked at Rouen and rejoined the army at Antwerp on the 2nd September.<sup>5</sup>

After the departure of the mobile troops the forts of the western sector—Emines, Suarlée, and St.-Héribert—continued to resist valiantly.

In particular, the fort of Suarlée did not fall until the 25th August,

<sup>1</sup> See "Le 10<sup>e</sup> de Ligne au siège de Namur," loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. i. p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Respecting this we read in the diary of a soldier of the 1st battalion of the 1st Regiment of the Prussian Guard: "Before a village named Ermeton . . . we took one thousand prisoners; at least five hundred of these prisoners were shot." This cannot refer to any place other than Ermeton-sur-Biert, and as the soldier notes these incidents on the date of the 24th August, the five hundred prisoners who were shot must have belonged to the Belgian rear-guard captured in this place. See the text in question in Evidence and Documents, p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence and Documents, deposition b5.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 65; J. Buchan, op. cit., loc. cit.

in the afternoon. On the preceding day it had been struck by about 1,300 projectiles. On the evening of the 24th the bombardment ceased, and the Germans tried an assault. The infantry occupying the fort and the guns of small calibre repulsed the assailants. On the 25th the bombardment recommenced with violence. The cupolas, though rendered immovable, remained intact and continued to fire. At 3 p.m. the last shelters were crushed, and a panic ensued among the survivors. It was, however, only two hours afterwards that the Prussian infantry obtained possession of the fort. In the middle of a thick and asphyxiating smoke the Germans found there the officers, the adjutant of stores, the doctor, the chaplain, and the wounded men. A part of the garrison appears to have escaped, perhaps with the troops occupying Fort Emynes. It is reported, in fact, that some eight hundred men escaped towards the south, in the woods that are on the north bank of the Sambre, but that they were surrounded and surrendered on the morning of the 26th.<sup>1</sup>

A letter of Lieutenant Von der Linde, of the Prussian Guard, printed in the Berlin newspapers, pretends to relate the surrender of the fort of Malonne. The lieutenant relates that he received an order to advance with five hundred men against the fort. Probably thanks to the mist so frequent in this hilly country near the river, he succeeded, in the company of four men, in crossing the bridge leading to the back of the fort. Thence he called to the commandant to surrender, saying that if he did not do so the artillery would bombard the fort. The commandant, taken absolutely by surprise, admitted the five men and handed over his sword. With him five officers and twenty men were made prisoners. The rest of the garrison had escaped. For this exploit Lieutenant Von der Linde received the Order of Merit; and it is mentioned that he was the youngest officer ever honoured with this distinction. He was only twenty-two.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible for us to check the correctness of this version, whose romantic character at the same time does not suffice to make us reject it *a priori*. The capture of Namur cost the loss of some 12,000 to 14,000 men. The relatively rapid fall of the place and the difficulties of the retreat gave birth to the most fantastic rumours.

The explanation is, however, very simple: the enemy employed from the outset his monster siege artillery, and prevented the garrison from making sorties. The only one attempted failed immediately. Besides, from the moment that General Michel no longer had on his flanks the protection of the Allies on the Sambre, and at his back the support of the French at Dinant, nothing could avert the catastrophe.

The capture of Namur was a victory of great siege guns; the capture of Antwerp will be another. This is the opinion of H. Lecomte, Lieutenant-Colonel of Engineers, one of the most distinguished Swiss military writers.<sup>3</sup> "The fall of Namur," he says, "is a military event

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* i. p. 215. It is not possible, as Mr. Buchan supposes, that this can refer to troops who had occupied the works connecting Suarlée and Emynes. These troops accompanied the 4th Division in its retreat.

<sup>2</sup> This information is given by E. Dane, *Hacking through Belgium*, p. 119, note \*.

<sup>3</sup> H. Lecomte, "Les opérations de l'armée belge en 1914," in the *Revue militaire suisse*, December 1915, No. 12, pp. 489-506.

far more characteristic than that of Liège. Here surprise plays no part at all. The attack has a distinct superiority over the defence, and this superiority results manifestly from the heavy artillery which the assailant has at his disposition. The problem of the attack on modern fortified places is solved by the Austrian 305 and the German 420. This is the general lesson which is to be gathered from the siege of Namur, and which the bombardments of Maubeuge and of Antwerp only confirm."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE DESTRUCTION OF DINANT AND THE REIGN OF TERROR IN THE DISTRICT OF NAMUR

WHILE Von Bülow's troops were besieging Namur, Von Hausen's army proceeded to force the passage of the Meuse south of the fortress. The enemy's efforts were principally directed against Dinant, where a portion of the army had met with the check on 15th August, as described above.

On the morrow of the combat of 15th August the French had strongly fortified the left bank at Dinant. The bridge itself was barred by barbed-wire entanglements; barricades were erected in the streets running down to the Meuse; the station and the level crossing over the railway on the highway from Dinant to Onhaye were put in a state of defence. The Hôtel de la Poste and the houses built along the Meuse were loopholed by the French troops, so as to command the river banks, and especially the bridge and its approaches.

On the right bank the French contented themselves with constructing a few barricades of paving-stone and some barbed-wire entanglements in front of the bridge-piers and near the church.<sup>1</sup>

From 16th August onwards the Germans on various occasions requisitioned flour and provisions. They got drunk and ill treated the people.<sup>2</sup>

On the night of 21st-22nd August a small force of infantry and pioneers, in motor-cars armed with machine guns, came down the road from Ciney and penetrated into the town by the Rue St.-Jacques. Without the least provocation from the inhabitants they started firing on the houses, shot at any one showing himself at a window, smashed in the doors, and seriously injured three people, one with bayonet wounds. Then they invaded the cafés, ordered drinks, and, becoming intoxicated, began to quarrel. Immediately they threw incendiary bombs into the houses, setting about a score on fire. When these madmen had taken themselves off, there were found in the streets two non-commissioned officers' caps with brain upon them, some technical books belonging to the pioneers, some incendiary bombs, and prismatic explosive bombs with handles.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These details are furnished by the French military staff. See Note 128, published by the *Bureau documentaire belge*, under the title of *Le Livre blanc allemand et les atrocités allemandes à Dinant*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Deposition of the French officer of engineers in charge of Dinant bridge. See Note 128 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*. Cf. 11<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. p. 141)*; 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (ibid., ii. p. 125)*; deposition of the Procureur du Roi at Dinant (*ibid., ii. p. 87*); and deposition b27 of the British Commission (*Evidence and Documents, pp. 42-3*).

The population, panic-stricken at first, came to believe that this attack was a mere drunkards' escapade, and were not unduly alarmed about what was to follow.

Next day, 22nd August, the 51st French Reserve Division arrived to relieve the 1st Corps of its duty of guarding the Meuse.

On Sunday, 23rd August, the Germans advanced in force against the French troops defending the passage of the river. The enemy came down on Dinant from the neighbouring heights about 6 a.m. by four principal routes, the Lisogne and Ciney roads, the slopes of Mount St.-Nicolas, and the Froidvau road. The fighting thus extended as far as Hastière, Anseremme, and Waulsort. At daybreak two sections and a half of the French 348th Regiment were defending the village of Hastière-par-delà, on the right bank; at 4.30 they were forced to retreat to the left bank. Here the village of Hastière-Lavaux was defended by a company of the 208th, assisted by a machine-gun section. At ten o'clock this detachment blew up the bridge, and at 1 p.m. they had to retire, protected by some of the 348th, who were holding the wooded slopes east of Insémont. These men continued their resistance until 8 p.m.

North of Hastière, near Waulsort, the Germans began at daylight to cross the river in small detachments, driving two sections of the French 208th before them. Lastly, at Anseremme, the French engineers had blown up the bridge the previous evening, but had not completely destroyed it, so that on the morning of the 23rd the enemy succeeded in throwing some bodies of infantry across to the left bank. The position was defended by a company of the 208th, who, finding themselves outflanked, evacuated Anseremme about 3.30 p.m. Dinant itself was vigorously attacked by the 12th Army Corps (the 1st Saxons) from dawn of 23rd August. An artillery duel was the prelude to the battle.

Some bodies of the enemy crossed the river above Dinant and got as far as Onhaye. But in the evening they were vigorously counter-attacked by the reserves of the French 1st Corps and driven into the Meuse.<sup>1</sup>

While the battle was in progress along the banks of the Meuse and the left bank was in the hands of the French, the Germans destroyed the portion of the town on the right bank and perpetrated a frightful massacre of the inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> On the confession of the German military authorities themselves, they were convinced that from 17th August the French forces had retired to the left bank, and that Dinant, Leffe, and Les Rivages, on the right bank, were clear of

<sup>1</sup> All these details are furnished by the French military staff. See Note 128 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*.

<sup>2</sup> The German White Book, *Anlage C*, contains a report called "Belgischer Volkskampf in Dinant," which pretends that the German atrocities were rendered necessary by an armed attack by the civilian population. See the Belgian reply in *La légende de la guerre des francs-tireurs en Belgique*, Note 118 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*, and the already mentioned *Livre blanc allemand et les atrocités allemandes à Dinant*. See also the report of M. Tschoffen, Procureur du Roi at Dinant (20<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*), and the examination of the German version by E. Grimwood Mears, *The Destruction of Belgium*, pp. 23-8, and J. H. Morgan, *German Atrocities*, pp. 12-14. See the *Réponse au Livre blanc allemand*, pp. 211-89, 468-82.

regular troops of the enemy.<sup>1</sup> Now, we have already shown that the French continued to occupy advanced posts on the right bank, and from these posts, cleverly concealed, they greeted the enemy's reconnoitring parties with rifle and machine-gun fire, especially on the night of 21st-22nd August. Without making any enquiry, the German command concluded that their reconnoitring parties had been attacked by civilians, that these were in possession of machine guns, and that they had erected the barricades, constructed wire entanglements, and loopholed the houses.<sup>2</sup> With the fear of francs-tireurs that haunted them perpetually, the German soldiers were bound to share their leaders' opinions. They came to the battle of the 23rd upset by the false alarms of their previous reconnaissances and full of prospective terror of street-fighting in a town without lights, with narrow passages, closed in between the river and the rocks, and exposed to the fire of the French guns posted on the other bank.<sup>3</sup> Such being the mental state of both officers and men, Dinant was condemned in advance. Its punishment was atrocious.<sup>4</sup>

The Germans reached Dinant (right bank) by four routes, we have said. In the four quarters by which they debouched they began at once to massacre and burn. They were seen coming down from the high ground and, on their arrival in the town, firing at haphazard. Through the empty streets the Germans marched in two files along the houses, the right-hand file watching the houses on the left and *vice versa*, all with their fingers on their triggers and ready to shoot. At every door a party closed up and halted, riddling the houses, and especially the windows, with bullets, until the inmates decided to open. In some places they threw grenades into the cellars. Where there was any delay in opening, doors and shutters were smashed with rifle-butts and hatchets, the house was invaded, and the inhabitants turned out, searched, and taken along. In some quarters the men were shot at once, in others they were rounded up in groups to be taken to the gaol or some other spot, where they were slaughtered. Over a hundred perished thus near the gaol. At the "Fonds de Leffe"

<sup>1</sup> German White Book, *Anlage C.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *La Légende de la guerre des francs-tireurs en Belgique.*

<sup>4</sup> The evidence about Dinant is abundant and in perfect agreement. The following may be consulted:—

11<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. pp. 141-4)*; report of the Procureur du Roi at Dinant, a witness and a victim himself (20<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête, in Rapports, ii. pp. 86-105*); 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport (Rapports, ii. pp. 125-7)*; *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, pp. 12-20*; Evidence and Documents, depositions b25 to b30.

German evidence: Pocket-book of a soldier of the 11th battalion of Rifles, 11th Army Corps (text and photograph in *Les violations des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne, i. No. 37*); diary of the soldier Büttner, 100th Regiment of Grenadiers, 12th Army Corps (*ibid.*, No. 48); diary of the soldier Erich Dressler, same regiment, same army corps (*ibid.*, No. 49); diary of the soldier Rudolf Rossberg, 101st Regiment of Grenadiers (2nd Saxons), 12th Army Corps (*ibid.*, No. 71); diary of the soldier Moritz Grosse, 177th Infantry (text and photograph in J. Bédier's *Les crimes allemands d'après les témoignages allemands, pp. 26-7*); diary of the soldier Matbern, 11th Rifles, from Marburg (Evidence and Documents, p. 253).

Photographs of the ruins may be found in vol. i. of *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, facing p. 144; in H. Davignon's *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, pp. 40, 68 (this author also gives on p. 50 a photograph of a safe burst open at Dinant); "German Atrocities on Record," published in *The Field*, 13th February 1915, pp. x-xiv (numerous photographs) and xvi.

M. Himmer, head of the works and vice-consul for Argentina, was killed, with 152 workmen. The Premonstrant church was entered during Mass—it was Sunday—the men were forcibly taken out and shot, and one of the Premonstrant Fathers was massacred also. In the Rue St.-Jacques quarter, from which a good number of the residents had fled after the night-scene of 21st–22nd August, the victims were less numerous. In the Rue du Tribunal quarter, the same scene of massacre was enacted. A party of men, including M. Tschoffen, Procureur du Roi, was shut up first in a blacksmith's forge and then taken to the gaol-yard, where it was greeted by volleys fired from the heights of Herbuchenne, which look down upon the yard. Another party, made up of men, women, and children, was taken to the bank of the Meuse. There, ranged up in a long file, the prisoners served as a shield against the fire of the French occupying the opposite bank, while the German troops marched behind them. As soon as the French became aware of this living rampart, they ceased firing in this neighbourhood. One young girl, nevertheless, was killed by a French bullet. Another party was similarly exposed to French fire in the gaol-square, amongst this being some of the magistrates. Finally, another party was lined up, four deep, against the wall of M. Tschoffen's garden. An officer made them a speech in German and then, in the presence of women and children, gave the order to fire. One hundred and twenty-nine victims fell; others feigned death and were able to escape during the night. Those who were only wounded remained lying where they fell as late as Wednesday, and died for want of attention.

In the Penant quarter the inhabitants were arrested as soon as the Germans arrived, and kept under observation near Rocher-Bayard. In this place, when the fire of the French on the left bank slackened, the Germans began to build a bridge. A few bullets continued to whistle overhead, however, and the Germans believed, or pretended to believe, that they were due to francs-tireurs. They sent the deputy clerk of the court to announce on the left bank that, if the firing continued, the townspeople collected near Rocher-Bayard would be shot. The clerk crossed the river and then came back to explain to the German officers that only the French soldiers were firing. At this moment some more bullets came over, and the unhappy group of men, women, and children was pushed against a wall and shot. There were eighty victims here.

While these horrible scenes were going on, a large number of women were taken to the Premonstrant convent and shut up in the cellars, where they remained from Sunday the 23rd till Friday the 28th, receiving as their sole food some dry macaroni and some carrots. A German officer came and offered to set them free for 60,000 fr. A priest who had come to hear their confessions offered 15,000 fr., whereon the officer pocketed the money, had the priest arrested, and took himself off. This was not the only theft. The men who had been brought to the gaol were taken out about 7 p.m. and despatched in the direction of Rocher-Bayard. On the way an officer of the 100th Saxon Infantry gave orders several times for them to be searched, and took possession of all objects of value, which he had collected in linen sacks.

Now Dinant and its suburbs were one immense brazier. The pioneers got to work with excellent appliances and set the houses on fire, after having stripped them of all that seemed of any value to their eyes. What remained was broken up, and on the fragments piled in the rooms the soldiers finally deposited their usual filth. At the fine old Gothic church the tower and roof were burnt; the gates were set on fire, but were not completely destroyed.

As a finish, 416 persons from Dinant and its neighbourhood were arrested and dragged as far as Melreux station, the journey being a perfect Calvary to them. At Melreux they were crowded into cattle-trucks, which took them to Cassel, in Germany. The first lot of these prisoners was set free on 18th November.

All through Monday and Tuesday the Germans continued their pillage and incendiarism.

During the night of the 23rd-24th the troops of the 1st French Army Corps and the items attached to them were compelled to abandon the defence of the Meuse, the enemy having forced the passage of the Sambre and driven in the troops covering the left flank of Namur.

The Germans therefore crossed the Meuse at Dinant, as well as above and below the town. They continued their massacres, incendiarism, and pillage on the left bank, in the St.-Médard quarter and the suburb of Neffe.

The balance-sheet of the sack of Dinant works out as follows: 606 civilians killed,<sup>1</sup> including 44 men over sixty-five years of age, 68 women and girls, and 50 children. Out of a total of 1,375 houses in the commune, 1,263 were destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

The remark is certainly applicable of a German lieutenant whose field-diary is in the hands of the Belgian military authorities. Wishing to stigmatize the excesses of his fellow-countrymen at Ottignies, he wrote: "*Die Hunnen und Landsknechte des Mittelalters haben es auch nicht besser können*" (The Huns and lansquenets of the Middle Ages could not have done better!).<sup>3</sup>

It was not, however, at Dinant only that Von Hausen's troops were active; throughout the whole of the Meuse region they slaughtered, plundered, and burnt, after forcing the passage of the river. It would be wearisome to repeat in the case of every commune the story of the German troops' atrocities. The story has been told elsewhere, and the method employed was always the same. Let us rather listen to some German soldiers describing their own exploits. In reading their descriptions we can get a general picture of the sufferings inflicted on the various places through which they passed.

<sup>1</sup> List of civilians massacred at Dinant in August 1914, in vol. ii. of *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, pp. 157-66. This gives the names, professions, addresses, and ages of the victims. The Germans did all in their power to prevent the circulation of this list. See the photograph of the proclamation of Burgomaster Bribosia in H. Davignon's *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 566.

<sup>2</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, vol. ii., annexe ii. p. 154; L. Mokveld, *The German Fury in Belgium*, pp. 166-8.

<sup>3</sup> Pocket-book of a German lieutenant mortally wounded at Gozée, 23rd August 1914 (*Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, vol. ii., annexe v, p. 172—German text, p. 173).



One of them sketches what happened on Sunday, 23rd August, "between Birnal and Dinant, at the village of Disonge":—

At eleven o'clock the order is given to advance, after the artillery has prepared the way. The pioneers and the 178th Infantry precede us. Quite close to a small village the inhabitants fire upon our front men. About 220 inhabitants were shot and the village burnt. The artillery continues without interruption. The village is situated in a deep ravine. At this moment, six o'clock in the afternoon, the crossing of the Meuse begins near Dinant. . . . All the villages, châteaux, and houses were set on fire during the night. It was a fine sight to see all the fires round about us in the distance.

A Saxon officer is still more precise. He writes of Bouvignes:—

We get in, through a breach made in the rear wall, to the property of a man in easy circumstances, and occupy the house. Through a maze of rooms we reach the threshold, where lies the body of the owner. Inside, our men have destroyed everything like Vandals: everywhere has been ransacked. Out of doors, over the countryside, the picture of the shot inhabitants lying on the ground defies description. The firing at short range has almost blown their heads off. Every house has been searched to the farthest nooks and the inmates dragged from all their hiding-places. The men shot, the women and children shut up in a convent.

This officer feels remorse, of which take note:—

At Leffe apparently two hundred men were shot. There must have been some innocent ones amongst them. In future we shall have to hold an enquiry into the guilt of these people, instead of shooting them.

A soldier of the same regiment describes the same scene. He has less feeling than his officer:—

In the evening, at ten o'clock, the 1st battalion of the 178th moved down into the burnt village north of Dinant. A fine, gloomy picture, giving one the shudders. At the entrance to the village lay about fifty inhabitants, shot for having fired at our troops from ambush. In the course of the night many others were similarly shot, so that we could count more than two hundred of them. Women and children, with lamps in their hands, were forced to be witnesses of the horrible spectacle. We then ate our rice in the midst of the corpses, for we had eaten nothing since the morning.

These pictures are eloquent. After them we may content ourselves with noting briefly, with the baldness of an official report, the places where the Saxon frenzy displayed itself. On the road from Dinant to Namur (right bank of the Meuse), thirty-nine houses were burnt down at Houx; at Yvoir only seventeen. The hamlet of Gemmechenne was almost entirely destroyed. At Sorinnes there was left the church, the château, and one farm. Wherever fighting took place, the inhabitants paid for it. At Waulsort, fifteen to twenty civilians were killed. At Hastière-par-delà, the Germans entered as soon as the French garrison evacuated the spot. The houses were set on fire with incendiary bombs and the inmates murdered. During the night of 23rd August the French posts on the left bank heard the cries of women and children. That most remarkable monument, the old church at Hastière, was odiously profaned: horses were stabled in it, the priestly robes were soiled and torn, the chandeliers, the statuary, and the holy water stoups all smashed. The relics which the Calvinists

of the sixteenth century and the Revolutionists of 1790 had respected were scattered.

The parish priest, M. Schlögel, a talented musician, was arrested at Hermeton, together with his brother-in-law, M. Ponthière, a professor of Louvain University, and without any form of trial both were shot. With them fell other inhabitants of Hermeton. On the same day, 24th August, the tragedy of Surice took place. In addition to a few who were shot in their homes or in the street, eighteen men, including the parish priest and his colleagues from Onhaye and Anthée, were brought out and slaughtered before the eyes of women and children, and their bodies immediately stripped. One hundred and thirty houses were destroyed.

The list goes on: Romedenne, Onhaye, Anthée, Sorinnes, Auvélais, Spontin,<sup>1</sup> Dourbes, all furnished their victims.

Such is what the crossing of the Meuse by Von Hausen's troops cost this region. They followed the retreating French and proceeded to carry on their work of death and devastation in France.

Meanwhile, as related in the preceding chapter, the fortress of Namur had fallen. Like Dinant, Namur had to put up with the caprices of the conqueror. The German troops made their way in on 24th August, at four in the afternoon. At first, all went off in an orderly manner. The officers and men requisitioned food and drink, paying sometimes in cash, but more often in vouchers, for the most part of a fantastic character. This state of things continued until 9 p.m. the next day. At that hour a sharp fusillade was suddenly heard in various parts of the town, and German soldiers were seen coming down the principal streets, shooting as they came. Almost simultaneously, a column of flame and smoke rose up from the central quarter. The enemy was setting fire to the Place d'Armes and four other spots—the Place Léopold, Rue Rogier, Rue St.-Nicolas, and Avenue de la Plante. The doors of the houses were broken in with blows from rifle-butts, and the Germans threw in inflammable materials. Some inhabitants who attempted to escape were slaughtered in the streets.

The burning of the Place d'Armes continued until Wednesday, 26th August, destroying the hôtel de ville, with its archives and paintings, a group of neighbouring houses, and, with the exception of one residence, the whole quarter lying between the Rues du Pont, des Brasseurs, and du Bailly. The head of the fire brigade was prevented by the Germans from taking steps to combat the fire. Thieving and plunder went hand in hand and continued for several days longer. About seventy-five civilians died in the fire or through shots.

Not content with having spread ruin, the Germans condemned Namur and the seventeen communes in its area to pay a contribution

<sup>1</sup> The soldier Max Thomas, 107th Infantry (8th Saxons), 19th Army Corps, writes in his diary concerning Spontin: "23rd August, at Spontin. A company of the 107th and another of the 133rd received orders to remain behind to search the village, make prisoners of the inhabitants, and burn the houses. At the entrance to the village, on the right, lay two young girls, one dead, the other seriously wounded. The parish priest was also shot in front of the station. Three other men were also shot, in accordance with martial law, and fifty made prisoners" (*La violation des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne*, i. No. 76—photograph).

of 50,000,000 fr., which was reduced subsequently to 32,000,000 in consideration of the payment of one million within twenty-four hours. We must also note that the Ophthalmic Institute, which had been turned into a hospital and was protected by the Red Cross flag, was burnt on the pretext that there had been firing from it. Before the flames were set to it, the German wounded were carried out of the wards, while two Belgian and two French wounded soldiers were killed.<sup>1</sup>

The neighbourhood of Namur was the scene of similar outrages. Near Fosses, at Marchovelette, Bonnine, Gelbressée, Tempoux, and Denée, acts of violence and murders were committed against civilians, both men and women.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the people of Namur, it was against the priests especially that the fury of the German was turned. Twenty-six of them were killed, in several cases with refinements of cruelty.<sup>3</sup> At Dinant, German soldiers were seen waiting at officers' tables and riding in motor-cars dressed in the white robes of the canons of St. Norbert, which they had carried off from the Abbey of Leffe.<sup>4</sup>

Altogether, Von Bülow's soldiers took pains to show that they were in no way inferior in violence and brutality to Von Hausen's Saxons or General Von Kluck's troops.<sup>5</sup>

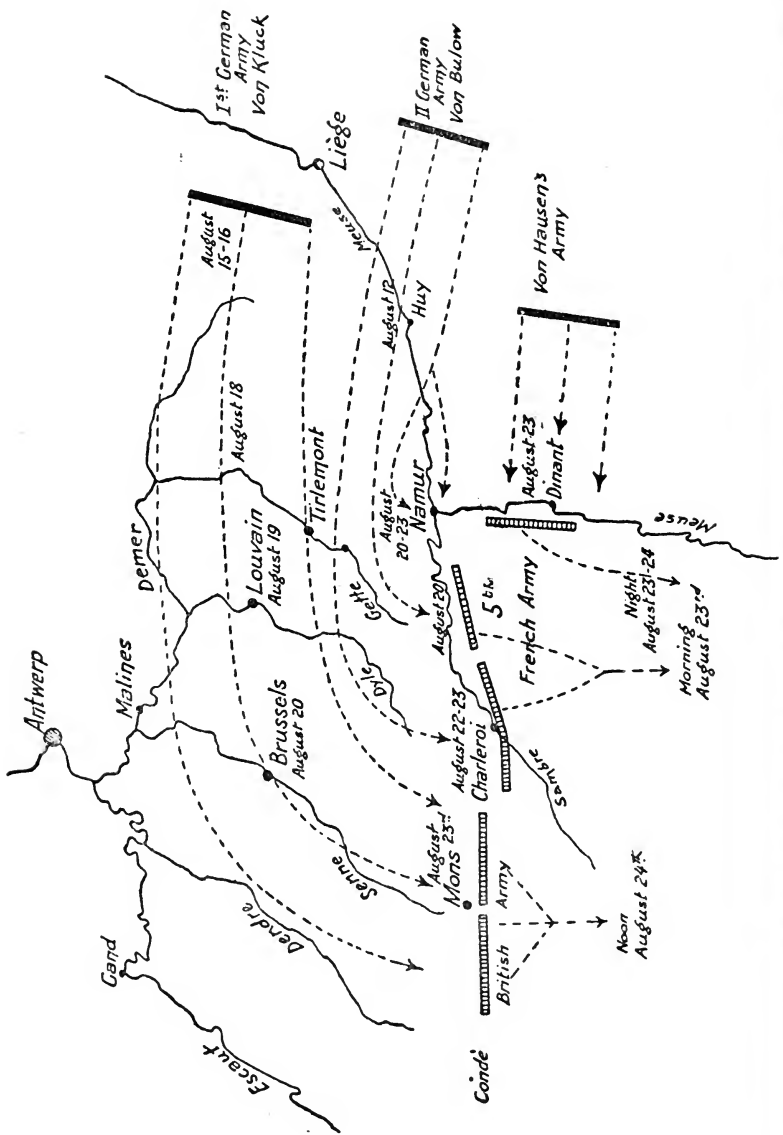
<sup>1</sup> On the events at Namur see 11<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, i. pp. 131-3); *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, p. 17; Evidence and Documents, depositions b11 and b12. Photographs of the ruins may be found in "German Atrocities on Record," *Field*, 13th February 1915, pp. xxiii-xxiv; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 50, 51, 52, 71, 72, 101; H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 38. See the notices posted up in Namur calling the attention of civilians to the fact that they cannot take part in the struggle, "German Atrocities on Record," pp. viii, xxvi (photographs). Concerning the wounded men killed in Dr. Bribosia's ward, see 7<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, i. p. 94).

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, pp. 16-17; Evidence and Documents, depositions b5-b10, b13; diaries of German soldiers in *La violation des lois de la guerre par l'Allemagne*, i. Nos. 45, 59, 76 (text and photographs).

<sup>3</sup> 11<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, i. p. 133); "Protestation solennelle de Mgr. Heylen, évêque de Namur" (*Rapports*, ii. pp. 186 ff.); Cardinal Mercier's Pastoral Letter, Christmas 1914; "Lettre mortuaire de la part de Saint-Julien-des-Belges à Rome" (H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 78); A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, pp. 16-22.

<sup>4</sup> "Protestation solennelle de Mgr. Heylen, évêque de Namur" (*Rapports*, ii. p. 192).

<sup>5</sup> See the proclamation which Von Bülow had posted up in Namur on 25th August 1914. The text of this document may be found in 7<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, i. pp. 80-1).



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE BATTLES OF MONS AND THE SAMBRE

WHILE the left wing of Von Bülow's army attacked Namur and Von Hausen's Saxons prepared to force the passage of the Meuse at Dinant and above and below that town, Von Bülow's centre and right wing advanced against the French army defending the line of the Sambre. Moreover, the whole army of Von Kluck, except for a sufficient force left behind to watch Antwerp and the Belgian field army, and some items detached towards the west of Belgium and Tournai, descended from Brussels and central Belgium to throw itself against the British position at Mons.<sup>1</sup>

The battles of Mons and the Sambre, therefore, took place at the same time as the siege of Namur and Von Hausen's attempt to force the Meuse south of the fortress, namely 22nd-23rd August.

What is generally called the Battle of the Sambre consisted of a number of engagements between the French and German troops, which were destined to secure for the latter the passage of the river and to break in the Allied front at this point. We cannot pretend to describe the whole series, but take note of the combats at Tamines, Lodelinsart, Gozée, Monceau-sur-Sambre, and Anderlues.

As on every other occasion when the German troops met with the enemy's regular forces, the invaders committed odious brutalities against the civil population. Tamines in particular suffered from their fury.<sup>2</sup>

Certain French detachments occupied the commune on 17th-19th August. On Thursday the 20th, a German patrol advanced as far as the suburb of Velaines, on the north bank of the Sambre. It was received with firing from some French soldiers and a group of civil guards. A few cavalry were killed or wounded and the rest took flight.

This affair was probably the cause of the massacre—in addition to the resistance offered by the French troops at this point. Soon the enemy returned in strength and prepared to force the passage of the bridge over the Sambre. An artillery duel took place between the German batteries, posted in the hamlets of Velaines and Alloux

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, ii, pp. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> On the events at Tamines see 11<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, i, pp. 134-7); 10<sup>e</sup> *Rapport* (*ibid.*, p. 120); 21<sup>e</sup> *Rapport* (*ibid.*, ii, pp. 119-23); *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, p. 17; Evidence and Documents, depositions b14, b15, b20; declaration of a Tamines miner, V. A. F., before the Court of First Instance at Ypres, in J. H. Morgan's *German Atrocities*, pp. 97-8. See H. Davignon's *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, pp. 71-2, for the photograph of a group of persons shot on the ruins of a burnt house, and another of the Place St.-Martin showing the places where chloride of lime was put down where the corpses lay.

on the north bank, and the French batteries at Arsimont and Ham-sur-Heure.

During the fight between the French troops stationed beyond the Sambre and the Germans from Velaines, who were stopped at the Tamines bridge, a large portion of the population of Alloux was seized, regardless of age or sex. The inhabitants were exposed on the meadows and fields south of Alloux church and served the Germans as living ramparts against the French fire. When this dishonest procedure had checked the fire, the civilians were shut up in Alloux church. Next day, about five o'clock, the Germans got possession of Tamines bridge. As they set foot on it, they drove before them some sixty men as a shield. The French did not fire, but let the Germans cross the bridge and mass themselves in close formation, still with the hostages in front of them. The latter, on reaching the south bank, tried to escape and take refuge in the houses close to the bridge, whereon the Germans shot at them and killed a few. Finally, as the enemy continued to advance, the French opened fire with machine guns. The hostages threw themselves flat, but despite every effort on the part of the French not to hit the civilians, some ten of them were killed or wounded. In the end the French withdrew. Then the Germans spread over Tamines. They penetrated into the houses, driving out the inmates, who had hidden themselves in their cellars during the fight, began to ransack and plunder, and finished up by setting the houses on fire with benzine syringes. They broke the pumps so that the water should not be used to put out the flames. Soon the houses in the Rue de la Station, the Place St.-Martin, and the Rue de Falizolle were ablaze. The inhabitants fled, but the majority of them were taken prisoners during the night and shut up in the church.

Next day, 22nd August, about 7 p.m., a group of 450 men, consisting for the most part of inhabitants of Alloux, was collected in the Place St.-Martin, a short distance from the Sambre. A German detachment took up its position with its back to the church, its rifles trained on the group of prisoners, in the direction of the river. An officer read out a travesty of a sentence and gave the order to fire. The first volley laid low only a portion of the victims. Some threw themselves down or were merely wounded. They were commanded to get up. A machine gun was brought, and a second volley cut down the rest. Several of the victims were still breathing. From the bleeding heap rose groans and cries for help. The soldiers therefore came up and, with bayonets, rifle-butts, and logs of wood finished off the wounded and dying. A few tried to save themselves by swimming, but were drowned in the Sambre.

Next day, about 6 a.m., a group of men was brought out into the square who had been taken prisoners in Tamines itself and its neighbourhood. An appeal was made for volunteers to dig a trench to bury the corpses. The voluntary gravediggers worked under a guard of soldiers with fixed bayonets. The women were fetched to the square and assisted in the gruesome task. Between 350 and 400 were buried thus. Then the gravediggers, with the rest of the prisoners, including women and children, were taken to Velaines. There an officer told them that they were free, but forbade them re-entering Tamines under

pain of being shot. The women and children were compelled to cry "Vive l'Allemagne!"

Apart from the inhabitants shot in the Place St.-Martin, a certain number of men, women, and children were burnt or suffocated in their homes. The list of victims comprises at least 336 names, according to a "Memorial" printed at Charleroi "by special permission."<sup>1</sup> It seems, nevertheless, that the total number of dead must be considerably larger than this estimate.<sup>2</sup> Among them are the Abbé Docq and M. Hottlet, parish priest of Alloux, and nine women.<sup>3</sup> Two hundred and seventy-six houses were destroyed.<sup>4</sup> These exploits were the work of the 77th German Infantry.<sup>5</sup>

While these things were happening at Tamines, other German columns were advancing on other crossings of the Sambre, through Hainault.

It was on Thursday, 20th August, that the first German soldiers appeared in the north-eastern portion of the district of Charleroi, while on the same date French troops arrived in the south.<sup>6</sup> On 21st August the Germans debouched from Orbais and made for Pont-à-Celles, of which the northern outskirts were defended by the 3rd platoon of the French 3rd Cyclists Corps. The enemy burnt the houses before leaving Orbais. The inhabitants of the village fled screaming towards Pont-à-Celles, pursued by cavalry at full gallop, who fired upon them. The French dared not fire on the Germans for fear of hitting the civilians who were fleeing in their direction. On the evening of Friday, 21st August, strong German forces occupied Fleurus, Gosselies, and the neighbouring villages, as well as the commune of Manage. The same evening a German column set fire to a house at Pironchamps and killed the four persons in it, including a girl of fifteen and a half.

The urban district of Charleroi was invaded on Saturday the 22nd. The first column left Gosselies in the morning and came down to Jumet, bringing with it some thirty inhabitants. Arrests continued at Jumet itself. The soldiers entered the houses and wounded several women by gunshot. When the column, with the prisoners at its head, reached the outskirts of Lodelinsart, it was received with machine-gun fire by French soldiers established in a trench barring the Brussels road and concealed in the courtyard of a house situated on the right of that road. Disorder was produced in the ranks of the assailants. As soon as they entered Lodelinsart, the Germans burst open the doors, set the houses on fire, and shot at, and maltreated the inhabi-

<sup>1</sup> See the photograph of the list in H. Davignon's *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Reports of the Commission of Enquiry* quoted above. Their figures do not agree. See also the list given by L. Van der Essen, *Some More News about the Destruction of Louvain*, pp. 13-15 (Chicago, 1915). This last list was given to us by an inhabitant of Tamines who escaped the massacre.

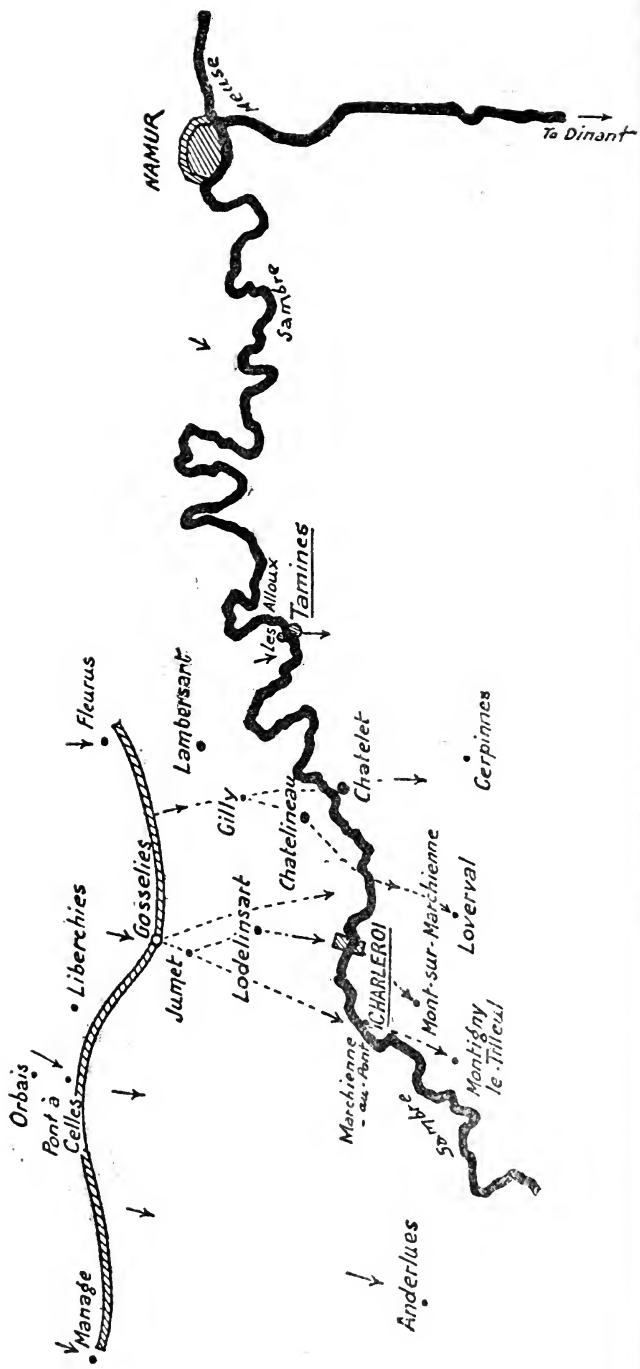
<sup>3</sup> See, besides the *Reports of the Commission of Enquiry* mentioned above, A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> See the list in vol. ii. of *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> The following details are taken from an enquiry held on the spot and published in the 22<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, ii. p. 133 ff.). There may be seen the complete list of atrocities committed in Hainault and figures of the civilians killed. Compare depositions b16-b25 of the British Enquiry (Evidence and Documents, pp. 32-40).

Nivelles



THE CROSSING OF THE SAMBRE BY THE GERMANS.



tants. From here the column proceeded towards Charleroi by way of Dampremy, spreading terror on its road.

On reaching Charleroi the enemy continued his work of destruction.<sup>1</sup> Incendiarism was systematically organized under the direction of the officers and was carried out in the Rue Grand-Central, on the Mons road, and in the Boulevard Audent. One hundred and sixty houses became prey to the flames. Some forty of the inhabitants perished. Some were burnt in their houses or suffocated in the cellars where they had taken refuge. Others were slaughtered the moment they tried to escape from their homes. Certain of the inhabitants, including Drs. Coton and Ponthière, the latter wearing the Red Cross brassard, were carried off and forced to walk in front of the troops.

Debouching from Charleroi, the Germans arrived at Mont-sur-Marchienne. There an engagement took place with the French troops, which developed soon over a front extending through Loverval right up to Gerpinnes, with Gozée as its centre. The German troops were also engaged there, which, coming from Châtelineau, had traversed Couillet and Loverval, plundering and burning as they went. The fighting at Gozée lasted the whole of 22nd August and a great part of the following day. It was a murderous affair, about 2,000 Germans and 500 French being killed.

Another German column, coming from Liberchies by way of Goselies, had a brush at Roux with some French dragoons. The latter having retreated, the Germans proceeded towards Monceau-sur-Sambre, where they arrived on 22nd August, about 9 a.m. On the bridge over the Sambre were posted some French machine guns, which welcomed the assailants with a vigorous fire. Once masters of the commune, the Germans took a cruel revenge. While a party of soldiers broke open the doors and windows, pioneers threw incendiary pastilles and grenades into the buildings. Two hundred and fifty-one houses were burnt and sixty-two ransacked. Eight inhabitants were shot; twenty-eight more perished, butchered the moment they left their houses. Thirty were wounded and eventually died. In all there were seventy victims. Neither old men, women, nor children were spared. Passing next through Marchienne-au-Pont, where they contented themselves with shooting a woman of seventy-four, the Germans proceeded to Montigny-le-Tilleul. Here they had another engagement with the French. Two wounded soldiers of the French 112th Line Regiment were finished off by the enemy, and another wounded man was shot. A certain Vital Arnauld, who had sheltered the last-mentioned, suffered the same fate. One hundred and thirty-one houses were burnt and thirty-six civilians shot.<sup>2</sup>

There is no need to wonder at these excesses, seeing that Freiherr Von Malzahn had a placard posted up at Châtelet, in which he ordered every inhabitant who harboured a Belgian or French soldier, wounded or not, to give information, under pain of being hanged and having his house burnt down. And did not the town commandant at Namur,

<sup>1</sup> There was no fighting at Charleroi itself. See M. des Ombiaux, *La résistance de la Belgique envahie*, pp. 71-5. It was on the line Gozée-Lobbes-Binche that the so-called Battle of Charleroi was fought.

<sup>2</sup> See the remarkably precise deposition numbered b18 in Evidence and Documents, pp. 33-7.

Von Bülow, feel called on to warn the population of Namur, on 25th August, that whoever did not hand over Belgian or French soldiers would be condemned to hard labour for life, while every soldier found would be immediately shot?

While the German armies were thus rapidly forcing the passages of the Sambre, the French cavalry corps under General Sordet, comprising three divisions, was hard pressed north of the river and called for help so as to escape from the enemy's grip. Sordet's corps was the link between the French army defending the Sambre and the British troops on the line Condé-Binche. On the afternoon of 21st August a brigade of French infantry, drawn mainly from Paris and Normandy, crossed the Sambre and arrived at Anderlues in the night. The Germans had no inkling of its presence. So, about nine o'clock on 22nd August, the German infantry appeared before Anderlues and advanced very confidently to within a few metres of the French lines. Suddenly a terrible fusillade broke out against the Germans, who stopped, wavered, and retreated. Some counter-attacks were delivered by the French, and some hand-to-hand bayonet-fighting occurred in the woods. Despite the assistance of powerful artillery, the German infantry made no appreciable progress. Finally, at four in the afternoon, after a counter-attack, the French brigade, having fulfilled its mission, broke off the fight and recrossed the Sambre, without the enemy daring to pursue it. The 6,000 infantry had been engaged with very superior forces. They lost thirty-six officers and 1,500 men. On the German side 3,000 men and a general were killed.<sup>1</sup>

The heroism of this French brigade very likely prevented the troops of the 10th German Army Corps from enveloping the left wing of the army fighting behind Charleroi, and successfully rescued the cavalry brigade.

Nevertheless, on the morning of the 23rd the enemy had crossed the Sambre between Namur and Charleroi, and the 5th French Army was beating a retreat in the direction of the Oise. At this moment Namur was on the point of falling and Von Hausen was occupied in forcing the passage of the Meuse at Dinant. The general situation, therefore, was very bad for the Allied troops at the time when Von Kluck launched his masses against the little British army and the Battle of Mons took place.<sup>2</sup>

The British at the time formed the extreme left of the Allied front. The expeditionary force under the orders of Field-Marshal Sir John French, after disembarking at Boulogne and effecting its concentration behind Maubeuge, took up a position extending along the canal from Condé on the west to Mons, and prolonging itself eastward through Mons and Binche. The first English troops had crossed the Belgian frontier on 21st August and during the whole of Saturday the 22nd the remaining infantry and artillery came up to take their place in the line. This day was spent in constructing trenches and preparing all

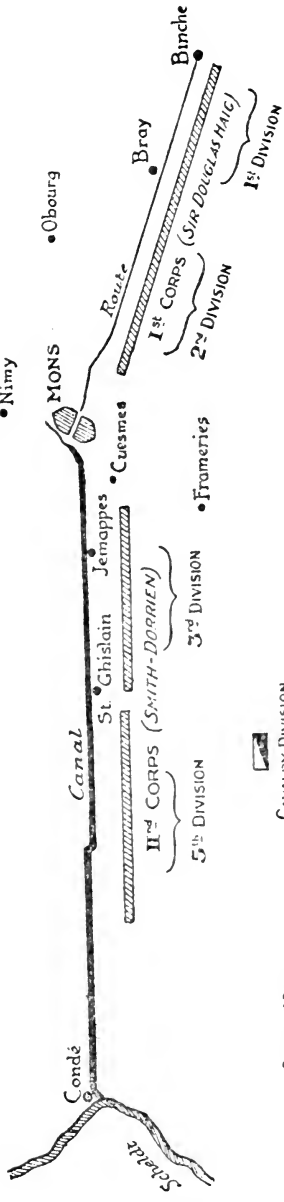
<sup>1</sup> Account published in the *Tribune de Bernay*.

<sup>2</sup> For the account of the Battle of Mons we have used the despatch sent by Sir John French to the War Office on 7th September 1914 (J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, ii. p. 225 ff., Appendix I), and the comments of J. Buchan (*ibid.*, ii. pp. 11-44). See also the article by "Miles" in *Le Correspondant* for 25th January 1916.

IV<sup>th</sup> GERMAN CORPS

IX<sup>th</sup> GERMAN CORPS

Tournai



THE BRITISH BATTLE-FRONT AT MONS.

defence possible. Field-Marshal French had with him at Mons only two of his three army corps, the 1st under the command of Sir Douglas Haig, the 2nd under General Smith-Dorrien. He had also available General Allenby's cavalry division. The positions of the 1st Army Corps extended from Binche to Mons; of the 2nd, from Mons to Condé, along the canal. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was at Binche, and in reserve was Allenby's cavalry division. The total force was about 75,000 men and 250 guns.

During Saturday the 22nd Field-Marshal French sent a portion of his cavalry to reconnoitre the wooded country extending north of Saint-Ghislain to Mons. The scouting parties ran into enemy patrols more or less everywhere. One British squadron pushed as far as Soignies, on the Mons-Brussels road. The scouts returned with the news that Von Kluck's army was approaching rapidly by all the roads leading from Brussels to the south-west; some columns were observed marching on Binche, others marching on the Condé canal.

On the morning of Sunday, 23rd August, Field-Marshal French had a conference with his generals. He had little suspicion of the formidable numbers of the enemy who were about to throw themselves upon the British front. Relying on the information received from the French General Headquarters, he supposed that at the utmost two army corps and perhaps one division of cavalry were advancing against his troops. The error was grave. Not only almost all Von Kluck's army was there, but also the victorious right wing of Von Bülow's, which was going to attempt a flank attack in the direction of Binche. Von Kluck, before commencing the assault, waited until the French Army of the Sambre had been driven well beyond the river.

At 1.40 p.m. the first shots were fired, and the German attack developed rapidly. In half an hour the artillery was in action along a front of 40 kilometres. Some of the British officers now suspected, from the number of the enemy's batteries, that the French Staff had underestimated the strength of the Germans. When the attackers had bombarded the British position with a sufficient quantity of shells and shrapnel, their infantry came forward to the assault. The British troops had the same feeling of stupefaction as the Belgians at Liège when they saw the attacking columns coming on in close formation. "It was like a football crowd on Cup day," wrote one of the witnesses of the attack in a letter home.

The Germans succeeded in advancing very close to the British trenches. Then suddenly a hellish fire broke out, rifles, machine guns, and artillery spitting out bullets and shrapnel. At the moment when the assault, despite terrible losses, was about to reach the trenches, the British leapt from their shelter with bayonets fixed. As at Liège, the enemy turned and fled.

Von Kluck's attack was vigorous against the British left, along the Condé canal, so as to keep Smith-Dorrien's soldiers busy and prevent the despatch of reinforcements to the extreme right, where the great blow was to be delivered. Von Bülow's success on the Sambre and the French retreat left the British troops exposed there to a turning movement. The attack was preceded at this point by a formidable bombardment of Binche and Bray; then a converging assault was directed on Binche itself. Absolutely overwhelmed by the rain of shells,

Chetwode's cavalry division, which was posted here to guard the flank, was forced to retire. Binche was attacked front and flank and had to be abandoned, Sir Douglas Haig shortening his right and retiring slowly south of Bray.

This retrograde movement of part of the right changed the configuration of the battle-line. Mons became a salient, and the position of the troops occupying the town was rendered perilous. If the enemy pierced the line right and left of the town, these troops would be cut off. Therefore Field-Marshal French ordered General Hubert Hamilton not to hold on to this salient too long, and in case of danger to bring back the centre of the battle-line behind Mons.

It was now 5 p.m. At this very instant Sir John French received from General Joffre a communication of a nature to cause him the most deadly anxiety. The message brought entirely unexpected news, namely that on the previous day, Saturday the 22nd, the Germans had become masters of the crossings of the Sambre between Namur and Charleroi, and that the French army was in full retreat; that not less than three army corps were attacking the British front, while a fourth was planning a vast turning movement, by way of Tournai, against the British left flank.

The news meant that at least 150,000 Germans were advancing against the 75,000 British at Mons, that the right wing was outflanked by a victorious army in pursuit of the French, and that the left was threatened by at least 40,000 men, who were attempting to turn it.

Field-Marshal French recognized that to continue the defence of Mons would expose his army to destruction. It only remained to hold on until night should end the enemy's attack, to give a short rest to his troops, and to retreat fighting towards the south as soon as daylight dawned on the 24th. In preparation for a retreat he had already chosen beforehand a position stretching from Jenlain to Maubeuge.

Up to nightfall the battle raged along the whole front. In the centre, Mons became untenable. The German batteries, massed on the edge of the woods stretching north of the town, rained a storm of shells on the troops there. Moreover, furious attacks threatened to pierce the front between the town and the Condé canal. The Germans had there gained possession of the suburbs. The Irish Rifles and the Middlesex Regiment were temporarily surrounded and suffered terrible losses. They managed to escape, with the help of the Gordon Highlanders, at nightfall. On the left wing, along the canal between Condé and Saint-Ghislain, the enemy's masses hurled themselves to death in trying to force the crossings. On the right, Sir Douglas Haig's troops resisted heroically in their positions behind Bray.

The first movements of the retreat began on the night of Sunday. All the heavy transports were sent to the rear so as to clear the roads, and the ambulances began to retire, taking as many as possible of the wounded.

At the first signs of the retreat, panic seized upon the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. The terror which the Germans inspired in them caused them to abandon their homes in precipitate flight, and soon the fugitives embarrassed the march of the British columns.

At dawn on the 24th the British army, before beginning to retreat, set out to deceive the enemy as to its real intentions. As the first

attack of the day would probably be directed against the right wing, Field-Marshal French decided to forestall this move by a counter-attack. When once this had started, Smith-Dorrien's 2nd Army Corps was to retire some distance from the Condé canal, to take up a new position and defend it until the 1st Army Corps should have formed up again in the rear.

Reinforcements appeared at this moment. The 19th Brigade of Infantry, which up to now had been guarding the lines of communication, arrived on the battlefield and proceeded at once to join Smith-Dorrien's troops.

In the first hours of the day the British 1st Division, supported by all the artillery of the 1st Army Corps, commenced the attack on the Germans coming on to the east of Mons as far as Binche and Bray. In the direction of Binche, the fire of some 125 British guns stopped dead all German advance against the right flank. Meanwhile the 2nd Division of the 1st Corps commenced its retreat southwards. When it was well on the way, the 1st Division broke off the counter-attack in the direction of Binche and covered the retreat, the artillery checking all enemy pursuit.

While these movements took place on the right, Smith-Dorrien had abandoned the Condé canal and had retired some 8 kilometres to the rear. There he was joined by the 19th Brigade and took up a new line of battle, stretching from Frameries on the right as far as the hamlet of Quarouble, near Valenciennes, on the left. In front of this position the troops of Von Kluck who had crossed the Condé canal found themselves suddenly checked. Smith-Dorrien was to keep them at bay until the 1st Army Corps was out of danger and reformed on the line Bavai-Maubeuge, after which he was to rejoin the 1st, taking up the position Bavai-Jenlain on its left.

About 7 a.m. Smith-Dorrien's troops at Frameries found themselves in a critical position. The Germans were attempting to outflank them between Frameries and Mons, thus cutting the communications between the two portions of the British army. The only reserve which Field-Marshal French had at his disposal, Allenby's cavalry division, was sent to the rescue. General Delisle, who commanded the 2nd Brigade of this, ordered the 9th Lancers to charge the flank of the advancing German masses. It was heroic madness. The British lancers fell upon a double line of barbed-wire and, according to an eye-witness, "galloped just like rabbits in front of a row of guns, men and horses coming down in all directions."

Nevertheless, the charge postponed for some time the danger threatening Smith-Dorrien's extreme right, and allowed the heroic Captain Francis Grenfell to save the 119th battery of Royal Field Artillery, whose guns had been abandoned in consequence of the death of almost all the gunners.

Towards noon Smith-Dorrien, who was fighting at this moment with a numerical inferiority of one to three, having learnt that the 1st Army Corps was safe and sound, broke off the battle and retired in his turn, protected by Allenby's cavalry.

In the afternoon the whole British army was collected again on the line Maubeuge-Jenlain. There was to begin the great retreat, only destined to end at the Marne. In this retreat the British

maintained valiantly the honour of their arms at Landrecies and Le Cateau.

During and after the Battle of Mons the German troops gave themselves up once more to the excesses and brutalities of which they had already been guilty wherever the Belgian and French armies had opposed them. The Nimy, Mons, Quaregnon and Jemappes district was ravaged.<sup>1</sup> At Obourg, north-east of Mons, the lunatic asylum was set on fire, though the sisters succeeded in rescuing the two hundred lunatics whom they had under their charge there. North-west of Mons, about 3 p.m., the Germans attacked Nimy and crossed the canal bridge. They avenged themselves on the inhabitants of the place for the damage which the British had inflicted on them. Seventeen inhabitants were massacred: women and young girls were violated; eighty-four houses were plundered and burnt. Then, seizing all the civilians on whom they could lay hands—men, women, and children—they made them walk before them as they entered Mons. Here they took the burgomaster, M. Lescarts, put him at the head of the column, and, behind the shelter of these civilians, attacked the British troops entrenched at the top of the Avenue de Berlaimont. The frenzied civilians attempted to escape. Several fell killed by the Germans, who shot them in the back.<sup>2</sup>

The same scenes occurred at Jemappes and Quaregnon. In these places, after the fighting, the German soldiers burnt down whole streets; some hundred houses at Jemappes, about one hundred and fifty at Quaregnon, were given up to the flames. Over seventy civilians were killed.

During the attack on Binche some British soldiers had entrenched themselves in a farm belonging to the burgomaster of Péronnes, M. Gravis, a member of the Chamber of Representatives. The British having retreated, the Germans burnt the farm. They then seized M. Gravis and his man-servant and shot them in front of the town-hall of Péronnes. In this place six other civilians were shot and sixty-three houses were burnt.

At Frameries and Cuesmes the British saw the Germans advancing to the attack behind a row of women and children.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, it is established that in several parts of the battlefield the British wounded were finished off by the enemy.<sup>4</sup>

A fortnight later Von Kluck's troops were to receive their punishment at the Battle of the Marne.

It remains to speak of the movements of the troops of the German 2nd Corps, which executed the enveloping manœuvre by way of Tournai.<sup>5</sup> They reached the outskirts of this town on Monday, 24th August, at the time when the British retreat at Mons was beginning. Tournai was occupied by a brigade of French territorials under the Marquis de Villaret.<sup>6</sup> After a skirmish outside the town, the French, whose numbers were very inferior, fell back on the Morelle

<sup>1</sup> See the 22<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>2</sup> See the evidence reproduced in *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. pp. 23-4.

<sup>3</sup> Evidence of British officers and soldiers (*Evidence and Documents*, 94-913)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-110.

<sup>5</sup> See information in the 22<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*.

<sup>6</sup> J. Buchan, ii. p. 46.

and Château suburbs. The Germans followed them up. At Morelle the French entrenched themselves in the houses and opened fire. In the end they abandoned this position in face of superior numbers and retreated to the centre of the town. When they reached the suburb, the Germans avenged themselves on the inhabitants, laying hands on several of them and shooting them at once. They then set a dozen of the houses on fire.

There was also fighting in the Château suburb. There the Germans made the inhabitants come out, lined them up in front of themselves, and so came on to the attack. Wishing to avoid killing the townspeople, the French ceased fighting and retired for good.

On reaching the centre of the town the Germans arrested the burgomaster, the aldermen who remained at their posts, and some municipal councillors. These hostages were collected at the townhall, where an officer read aloud to them a proclamation condemning the town, under pain of destruction and the execution of its inhabitants, to pay within three hours a war-contribution of 2,000,000 fr. in gold and to hand over two hundred hostages. They managed to raise 1,700,000 fr., the remainder being covered by a bill, signed jointly by the municipal councillors who were present.

About 11 p.m. the hostages were set free, except the Bishop, Mgr. Walravens, and some municipal councillors. At midnight these were escorted to Ath, with some French prisoners and some plunderers of the dead, who had been arrested on the field of battle. At Ath they were maltreated. The Bishop of Tournai, an ailing old man, was imprisoned for five days in a dirty spot, with only a mattress as bed. On the journey a soldier had given him a punch in the back to make him walk faster.<sup>1</sup> This bad treatment probably hastened the Bishop's death; he died shortly afterwards.

On Tuesday, 25th August, the troops of the 2nd Army Corps left Tournai to pursue the British army. About four hundred of the inhabitants were carried off and forced to accompany the columns for about thirty-six hours. Then, after abusing them and threatening to shoot them, the Germans released them.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, after Visé, Liège, Aerschot, Andenne, Namur, Tamines, and Dinant, the ancient capital of the Franks learnt the precise meaning which the German Government attached to the expression "the horrors of war."

The French communiqué of 25th August announced the result of the battles of Mons and the Sambre as follows :—

West of the Meuse the British army, which was on our left, was attacked by the Germans. Its conduct under fire was admirable, and it resisted the enemy with its usual coolness. The French army which was operating in this region advanced to the attack. Our army corps, with the African troops in the first line, carried forward by great enthusiasm, were received with a murderous fire. They did not give way, but later a counter-attack of the Prussian Guard forced them to retire. They did not retreat until after having inflicted on the enemy enormous losses. The flower of the Prussian Guard suffered considerably. . . . By order of General Joffre, our troops and the British have taken up their positions on the line of defence, which they would not have left had not the admirable effort of the Belgian army enabled us to enter Belgium.

<sup>1</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. pp. 120, 124, 151 n6; ii. pp. 23-4, 134. Cf. also H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 54; A. Métol, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>2</sup> *22<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête*, loc. cit.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIELD ARMY AROUND ANTWERP : THE FIRST SORTIE

(25th-26th August)

WE have just heard the high praise accorded by the French military command to the Belgian army. At the same time one of the most distinguished members of the Institut de France, M. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, wrote in *L'Économiste français* :—

Germany's enormous miscalculation and the considerable delay imposed on her offensive are without doubt due to the magnificent resistance of the Belgians, not only at the Liège forts, but all over Belgium. Civilization can never be grateful enough to this little people, which with admirable energy held up for a fortnight and more the Germanic hordes.\*

From England also came at this moment words of admiration for the soldiers of King Albert. At the sitting of the House of Lords on 25th August Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, spoke as follows :—

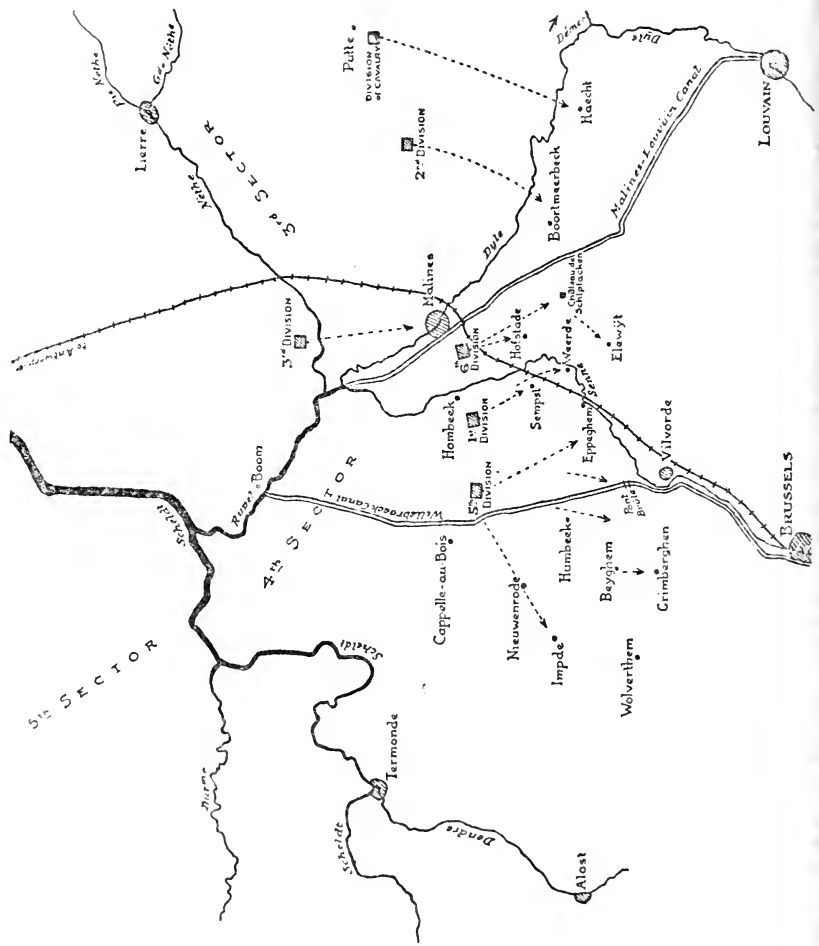
Had the conditions of strategy permitted, every one in this country would have rejoiced to see us ranged alongside the gallant Belgian army in that superb struggle against desperate odds which has just been witnessed. But, although this privilege was forever denied to us, Belgium knows of our sympathy with her in her sufferings, of our indignation at the blows which have been inflicted on her, and also of our resolution to make sure that in the end her sacrifices will not have been unavailing.

Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, in his turn pronounced these moving words :—

The Belgians have won for themselves the immortal glory which belongs to a people who prefer freedom to ease, to security, even to life itself. We are proud of their alliance and their friendship. We salute them with respect and with honour. Belgium has deserved well of the world.

The sympathy of the Allied nations may have induced their spokesmen to exaggerate the deserts of Belgium ; but the following facts are undeniable. Thanks to the resistance of Liège, the efforts of the field army on the Gette, and the stoicism of the garrison of Namur, the German troops, instead of appearing in front of Paris within a few days, did not cross the French frontier until 24th August, or the twenty-third day of mobilization in France. Really, during the first fortnight of the war, the Belgian army, while defending the neutrality

\* P. Leroy-Beaulieu, *La guerre de 1914 vue en son cours chaque semaine*, Paris, 1915, p. 20.



of its country and the inviolability of its territory, acted as cover for mobilization and concentration in France and allowed the British to convey themselves in complete security to the line of Mons.

It might have been thought that, after having rendered these services to the Allies, the Belgians would rest for some time under the walls of Antwerp. Nothing of the kind, as the present chapter will show.

We have seen above that from 20th August the Belgian field army established itself within the perimeter of the fortified position of Antwerp, on the Rupel and Nèthe, with a portion detached at Termonde. It rested on the line of forts defending the place.

In this situation it covered the national citadel and a good part of the province of Antwerp and of Flanders, which it saved thus from an invasion in force. It constituted a permanent menace to the German army's lines of communication. It was in a position which allowed it to adapt all its activities to the concerted plan which it had to carry out in conjunction with the French and British forces. From this point of view, it would act in such a fashion as to attract and keep in front of it the largest possible number of enemy troops. It would take the offensive at the moment when the Franco-British armies were engaged in important fighting and when it was of great importance to keep back German reinforcements on their way to France. It would strike, too, at the moment when the proportion between the Belgian and German effectives facing one another offered a favourable chance of an offensive.<sup>1</sup>

The operations of the Belgian army round Antwerp would naturally take place in those sectors which best lent themselves to the execution of the plans of which we have just spoken, namely the third, fourth, and fifth sectors.<sup>2</sup>

The third sector stretched between the Dyle and the Little Nèthe. It lent itself ill to tactical operations, owing to the nature of the ground. Outside the zone cleared for gun fire the ground was very cumbered. Every sortie must encounter two serious obstacles: the Dyle, prolonged by the Démer, and the Malines-Louvain canal. On the other hand, it was in this sector that the Belgians could most gravely threaten German communications through Louvain and Brussels.

The fourth sector lay between the Dyle and the Dendre. The topographical conditions here were more favourable, though the field of vision was no less limited. But no important natural obstacle here impeded an advance. On the other hand, there was less menace here to the German lines of communication.

The fifth sector, on the left bank of the Scheldt, was of capital importance to the army. It assured communications with the sea and with the Allies, and it was by this way that the army must escape from Antwerp if the need of that should come. Fortunately, it was easy to defend. The Scheldt bounded it on the south. On the river, Termonde, an obsolete fortress, formed an important bridgehead for such offensive operations as might be undertaken. The Durme, a broad river, with banks which could be flooded, made a double obstacle to the north.

After 21st August, we know, the active corps of the German army

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> See *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 67-8.

disappeared from the Belgian front and turned towards the Sambre and Hainault. An army of observation was stationed before Antwerp, composed of the 3rd and 9th Reserve Corps. Elsewhere the 13th Reserve Division and one or two divisions of Landwehr established themselves in the direction of Liège.

Just after these troops arrived there took place in the south the battles of the Sambre and of Mons. On 24th August the Belgian High Command heard the news of these battles. At once the moment seemed to it favourable for a sortie in accord with the plan of campaign set out above. The bulk of the enemy's armies seemed sufficiently far away and deeply engaged for their intervention not to be feared. But the sortie must be made before the observation corps could have time to fortify their positions solidly. These stretched over a very wide front, from Wolverthem through Elewyt as far as Diest.<sup>1</sup> The hope might be cherished of breaking through the lines of the 3rd and 9th Corps, and so seriously threatening the enemy's communications. In this way assistance might be given to the armies of the guarantor nations operating in the south, reinforcements already on their way might perhaps be attracted, and at the same time the enemy would be prevented from pressing too closely the fortified position at Antwerp. There were the lessons of Liège and Namur to show the necessity of checking the enemy from advancing his great siege guns too near to the forts.

The first sortie of the troops from their entrenched camp was therefore decided upon. The plan adopted was as follows: The 6th Division was entrusted with the task of making the central attack on Hofstade and Elewyt; the 1st and 5th Divisions were to operate on its right, between the Willebroeck canal and the Senne; the 2nd Division was to act on its left in the direction of Boortmeerbeek; the reserves were the 3rd Division, supporting the 6th, and the cavalry division stationed at Putte.<sup>2</sup>

To the 5th Division fell the duty of opening the operation decided on. In the afternoon of 24th August, with the help of the artillery group of the 5th Division, the 3rd Chasseurs, forming the van, pushed on boldly towards Impde. Meeting there the enemy's outposts, the Belgians drove them out of the place after a furious struggle, during which Major Sweerts and other officers fell. This move was supported by the 2nd Chasseurs, who made for Nieuwerode, exchanging shots with the advanced parties of the enemy and throwing out detachments towards Beyghem and Humbeek. This, however, was nothing more than a feint, intended to alarm the Germans about their left wing. The real main attack was to be delivered next day on the German centre, between the Willebroeck and Malines-Louvain canals. Therefore, as soon as night fell, the 2nd Chasseurs retired on Capelle-au-Bois and crossed at dawn to the east bank of the Willebroeck canal to assist in the attack by the 5th Division on Eppeghem.

The Belgians advanced cautiously, behind a screen of scouts who sought to get in touch with the enemy. The companies sprang from cover to cover. At first only the dry crack of isolated rifles was to be heard. Then a heavy sound shook the air; the guns were opening

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 69.

fire and raining shells and shrapnel on the enemy's positions. Soon the hostile artillery answered in turn. In the midst of a storm of shot and shell the troops of the 5th Division advanced by leaps, from time to time throwing themselves down in obedience to the officers' whistles, only to begin their advance again immediately. The Eppegghem defences were carried, the Germans falling back. Some parties of Belgians swarmed south of the village, occupied the station, and pushed on as far as Houthem. There a brisk fire met them. The enemy was there in force, and it was necessary to halt so as to link up with the neighbouring troops of the 1st Division.<sup>1</sup>

These troops, while the 5th Division was capturing Eppegghem, had attacked Sempst and Weerde. They succeeded in overcoming the obstinate resistance of the enemy and capturing both villages. Further on, the 6th Division carried Hofstade and reached the woods of Schip-laeken. Elsewhere, on the left wing, the 2nd Division, in spite of all its efforts, was unable to debouch on the west bank of the Louvain canal, and was even compelled to retire.

Soon the centre was also checked before Elewyt, which the troops of the 6th Division attacked in vain; the Germans were too strongly organized there.

The night of 25th-26th August passed in comparative calm. But in the morning the action started again more violently. The enemy, who had been surprised the previous day by the suddenness of the attack, had recovered himself and called up his reserves to aid him. It was soon found that he had abundant heavy artillery, which swept with projectiles the positions occupied by the Belgians. It is true that the Belgian artillery responded vigorously, but the contest was too unequal. The enemy's heavy pieces soon managed to silence the field guns. At this time the Belgians were entirely without heavy artillery, and in these circumstances it was impossible for them to disorganize the enemy's lines and break through them.

While this inferiority was making its consequences felt, the news arriving from the right wing was not of the most favourable nature. At Houthem the chasseurs of the 16th Brigade were violently attacked and driven back on Eppegghem. In this last village the struggle was bitter. The heavy German projectiles rained down fast, with a deafening noise. Nevertheless, the Belgians only retired step by step, bearing the bombardment stoically. Some parties of them even pressed forward to attack the machine guns, which threatened to mow down the retreating troops. It was necessary, however, to abandon what had been won the previous day at the price of such sacrifices.<sup>2</sup>

At Pont-Brûlé also the fighting was hot. On the evening of the 25th the 3rd battalion of the 2nd Chasseurs (Major Verbrugghe) had been sent thither. It discovered that the enemy had fallen back on the west bank of the Willebroeck canal. Next day an attempt would be made to force the crossing. The hamlet of Pont-Brûlé extends along the west bank. The Germans occupied the houses there, keeping the bridge itself under their fire. As the lever for working the draw-bridge was on their side they had half-lifted the bridge, so as to prevent

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 7th October 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9th October 1915.

all crossing by it, and had constructed along the canal some trenches, which were held by a section of sharpshooters.

The Belgians deployed on the opposite bank, two companies seeking, north and south, to take the German defences obliquely. Major Verbrugghe had asked for some guns to demolish the houses occupied by the Germans at the entrance to the bridge.

Rapid action was necessary, for the thick smoke rising from a heap of lighted straw as a signal showed that the enemy was calling for reinforcements, and behind the Belgians the battle was raging at Eppeghem.

There was only one resource, to try to get at the lever of the draw-bridge, to let the latter down, and to force the passage violently. But how was it to be done? Several men and officers had barely raised their heads from cover when they fell dead, killed by the fire of the picked marksmen posted on the opposite bluff. A volunteer was forthcoming, however, the soldier Trésignies, a militiaman of the 1906 class. Taking off all that could be in his way, he slipped along the trench, looking for the spot where the uplifted bridge would hide him from the enemy's view. Finding this, he sprang out of the trench, let himself roll down the bluff, and plunged into the canal. The enemy had seen nothing. Trésignies swam across to the opposite bank, clung to the bluff, and crawled as far as the handle which operated the bridge. Then, exposing himself to the enemy's fire, he raised himself up and applied all his strength to the lever. Suddenly cries were heard coming from the Belgians who, hidden in the houses near the bridge, were watching with gasping breath the hero's movements: "The other way! The other way! You're lifting it up!" As quick as lightning, Trésignies changed his tactics. But the enemy had heard. Flashes shot out from the trench whose fire commanded the bridge obliquely. Trésignies was seen to drop on one knee; but he hung on desperately to the handle and continued to turn. All of a sudden he let go, beat the air with his arms, and sank down on the bank mortally wounded.

A mad rage seized his fellow-countrymen. A storm of cries rose up against the Germans: "Swine! Murderers! Blackguards!" At this moment the German reinforcements arrived. A machine gun began to rattle, and Commandant Bradfer fell dead.

To make the situation still more critical, now the Belgian artillery began to bombard Pont-Brûlé. A shell burst a few yards behind the chasseurs. This was the artillery which was expected to lend its aid; but it was not suspected by the gunners that the Belgians were there, close to the bridge. Between two fires, it was necessary to retire. The withdrawal was carried out calmly, at the very moment when the order for a general retreat was given to the whole army.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, with the left wing giving up the attack on the Louvain canal, the centre checked in front of Elewyt, and the right wing slowly driven back from Eppeghem, the safety of the army would be compromised if the attempt to pierce the German lines were persisted in. The High Command, moreover, had been informed that the battles of the Sambre and of Mons had already finished by the night of the 24th August. It was useless, therefore, to continue operations. A withdrawal northward was ordered.

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire," etc., loc. cit.

The army retired fighting vigorously. The struggle was intense all along the embankment of the Brussels-Malines railway. This phase of the operations was followed by an American war-correspondent, Mr. E. A. Powell, who describes it so vividly that it seems best to quote his actual words here:—

At dawn on the second day [26th August] an artillery duel began across the embankment, the German fire being corrected by observers in captive balloons. By noon the Germans had gotten the range and a rain of shrapnel was bursting upon the Belgian batteries, which limbered up and retired at a trot in perfect order. After the guns were out of range I could see the dark blue masses of the supporting Belgian infantry slowly falling back, cool as a winter's morning. Through an oversight, however, two battalions of carabiniers did not receive the order to retire and were in imminent danger of being cut off and destroyed. Then occurred one of the bravest acts I have ever seen. To reach them a messenger would have to traverse a mile of open road, swept by shrieking shrapnel and raked by rifle-fire. There was about one chance in a thousand of a man getting to the end of that road alive. A colonel standing beside me under a railway-culvert summoned a gendarme, gave him the necessary orders, and added, "*Bonne chance, mon brave.*" The man, a fierce-moustached fellow, knew he was being sent into the jaws of death; but he merely saluted, set spurs to his horse, and tore down the road, an archaic figure in his towering bearskin. He reached the troops uninjured and gave the order for them to retreat; but as they fell back the German gunners got the range, and with marvellous accuracy dropped shell after shell into the running column. Soon road and fields were dotted with corpses in Belgian blue.

Time after time the Germans attempted to carry the railway embankment with the bayonet, but the Belgians met them with blasts of lead, which shrivelled the grey columns as leaves are shrivelled by an autumn wind. By mid-afternoon the Belgians and Germans were in places barely a hundred yards apart, and the rattle of musketry sounded like a boy drawing a stick along the palings of a picket-fence. During the height of the battle a Zeppelin slowly circled over the field like a great vulture awaiting a feast. So heavy was the fighting that the embankment of a branch railway from which I viewed the afternoon's battle was literally carpeted with the corpses of Germans who had been killed during the morning. . . .

By four o'clock all the Belgian troops were withdrawn except a thin screen to cover the retreat. . . . The retreat from Malines provided a spectacle which I shall never forget. For twenty miles every road was jammed with clattering cavalry, plodding infantry, and rumbling batteries, the guns, limbers, and caissons still covered with the green boughs which had been used to mask their position from German aeroplanes. Gendarmes in giant bearskins, chasseurs in uniforms of green and yellow, carabiniers with their shiny leather hats, grenadiers, infantry of the line, guides, lancers, sappers and miners with picks and spades, engineers with pontoon-wagons, machine guns drawn by dogs, ambulances with huge Red Cross flags fluttering above them, and cars, cars, cars, all the dear old familiar American makes among them, contributed to form a mighty river flowing towards Antwerp. Malines formerly had a population of 50 000 people, and 45,000 of these fled when they heard that the Germans were returning. The scenes along the road were heartrending in their pathos. The very young and the very old, the rich and the well-to-do and the poverty-stricken, the lame and the sick and the blind, with the few belongings they had been able to save in sheet-wrapped bundles on their backs or piled in push-carts, clogged the roads and impeded the soldiers. They were completely terrorized by the Germans. But the Belgian army was not terrorized. It was a retreating army, but it was victorious in retreat. The soldiers were cool, confident, courageous, and gave me the feeling that if the German giant left himself unguarded a single instant little Belgium would drive home a solar-plexus blow.<sup>1</sup>

On the night of the 26th the field army had returned to the entrenched camp of Antwerp.

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 145-151. To appreciate the American war correspondent's description, it is necessary to know that Mr. Powell watched the battle from the outskirts of the village of Sempst, at a place between the village itself and the embankment of the Malines-Brussels railway.

The Germans had been surprised by the sudden onslaught of the Belgians. The cannonade spread panic in the garrisons of Brussels and Louvain. Recovering from their shock, the Germans proceeded to avenge themselves in an atrocious way on the unhappy inhabitants of the regions which had been temporarily threatened by the Belgian advance.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE SACK OF LOUVAIN AND THE GERMAN ATROCITIES IN THE LOUVAIN-MALINES-VILVORDE TRIANGLE

WHEN the victorious Belgian troops entered the villages of Hofstade, Sempst, and Eppeghem, atrocious scenes presented themselves to their eyes. The enemy, furious at having been surprised by the sortie from Antwerp, had given himself up to bloody reprisals against the inhabitants of the places which he was forced to abandon.<sup>1</sup> In these villages, as in the region between Malines and Aerschot, the excesses committed did not at all resemble the atrocities of Aerschot, Andenne, Tamines, and Dinant. There it was a case of wholesale executions by order of the officers and methodically conducted. In the Malines-Vilvorde-Louvain triangle were seen the outrages of brutes, prompted by their depraved and Sadic instincts. Outrages against women and young girls were particularly numerous. The German army seems to have been abandoned to its vicious inclinations by its officers, and even some of these latter were led away by the general debauchery of the troops to commit lesser outrages.<sup>2</sup> It is noticeable that the majority of the wounds were not inflicted by gunshot but by steel, and especially by the terrible saw-bayonet with which the German soldiers are provided.<sup>3</sup>

Already during the attack the Belgians witnessed scenes which allowed them to guess what they would find in the villages when once they had won them from the enemy. A machine-gun officer, advancing with his section to the attack on Hofstade, saw a woman of about fifty running from the blazing village along the highroad. From the woods which bordered this road leapt a German, who plunged his bayonet into the fugitive's back and, the crime committed, sped off in the direction of the village.<sup>4</sup>

It was at Hofstade that the German soldiers committed the most excesses. The Belgian patrols, entering the village after the German retreat, made a round of the houses so as to secure any enemies who might still be there. Others walked about a little during the interval of rest given to the troops after taking the village. In the houses they found stretched on the ground the bodies of men and women, their stomachs ripped open by bayonets, and boys of fifteen to sixteen

<sup>1</sup> See 2<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. pp. 48-9)*; 3<sup>rd</sup> *Rapport (Rapports, pp. 55-6)*; *Report of Committee on Alleged German Outrages, p. 25 et seq.*; Cardinal Mercier's Pastoral Letter.

<sup>2</sup> See the depositions *d53* and *d61* (relating to the same fact) published in the British Commission's Evidence and Documents.

<sup>3</sup> This also struck the members of the British Commission. Cf. *Report of the Committee, p. 25.*

<sup>4</sup> Evidence and Documents, *d59.*

crouched in corners, in attitudes of supplication, their faces and bodies pierced with bayonet and lance wounds.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to imagine the wrath of the soldiers at the sight of these abominable crimes. At Hofstade itself there were tragic scenes. One Belgian artilleryman went to his parents' house in the village. On reaching it he found the door closed. No one answered his calls. He forced his way in and immediately recoiled in horror. On the ground, in a lake of blood, were stretched the bodies of his father, mother, sister, and brother. Demented by this frightful spectacle, the artilleryman rushed out, unharnessed one of the horses of his battery, mounted it, and galloped off in the direction of the German lines. He was never seen again.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the male inhabitants had been carried off as hostages by the Germans during their retreat, and a number of houses were set on fire by means of excellently adapted implements. The official report puts the figure at fifty-six.<sup>3</sup>

When they debouched from Hofstade and gained the woods of Schiplaeken, the Belgians found, in an outbuilding of the château of that name, the corpse of the caretaker vilely mutilated.<sup>4</sup>

The troops who took Eppeghem made the same ghastly discoveries. There also civilians had been massacred. A pregnant woman had been killed with bayonet wounds.<sup>5</sup> The village offered a lamentable spectacle. Within the houses there lay on the floors, pell-mell, in indescribable confusion, battered and destroyed, the furniture and other things which had been considered too worthless to loot. Here and there the Belgians saw the panic-stricken villagers coming out to the thresholds of their homes. The soldiers strove in vain to reassure them. A few hastily collected their scanty belongings and fled towards Antwerp in mad terror.<sup>6</sup>

At this picture of human distress, writes an officer, I have seen my men's eyes flash with terrible resolutions of vengeance. Nevertheless, if ever one of these helmeted bandits fell into their hands—pale, cowardly, and sweating with terror—our soldiers forgot their oaths of revenge and remembered only that they had before them an unarmed enemy. I shall never forget a big ruffian of a German, with the face of an Apache, grovelling on his knees before a little infantryman, who had thrust his fist under his nose and treated him like dirt. With his hands clasped and all his great bony carcass trembling with fright, the German groaned: "*Nicht kapout, nicht kapout, kamarad!*" At last, with a gesture of huge disgust, the infantryman leant towards him and shouted these words in his face: "Shut your jaw, you bandit! We are not murderers!"

The official figures for Eppeghem are 176 houses burnt and eight inhabitants killed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A list drawn up by the Belgian Commission of Enquiry, and published in the annexe to vol. ii. of *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, only gives six victims for Hofstade. The real number of killed is certainly larger. The British Commission has collected and published a very large number of depositions of Belgian soldiers. Taking into account the fact that several depositions refer to the same case, we can make out at least a score of different crimes ending in the victims' deaths. See Evidence and Documents, d6-d64.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence and Documents, d36.

<sup>3</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, vol. ii. p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence and Documents, d33-d40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, d87, d88.

<sup>6</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 7th October 1915.

<sup>7</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. p. 147.

At Sempst<sup>1</sup> the retreating Germans carried off some forty men as hostages. An old man who refused to follow them was killed. During their withdrawal the soldiers set fire to several houses. Eighteen inhabitants were killed, one woman and her child being burnt in their home, as was the proprietor of a bicycle shop. Near the village Mr. Powell, the American war correspondent, helped to bury an old man and his son, killed because a Belgian soldier had fired on the Germans in front of their house. "The old man's face," Mr. Powell says, "had twenty-two bayonet-wounds; I counted them."<sup>2</sup> Twenty-seven houses were burnt.<sup>3</sup>

At Elewyt men, women, and children were killed and mutilated.<sup>4</sup> There were some ten victims, and 133 houses were burnt.<sup>5</sup> At Beyghem,<sup>6</sup> Grimberghen,<sup>7</sup> Humbeek-Sas,<sup>8</sup> Weerde,<sup>9</sup> and Malines itself,<sup>10</sup> excesses of the same kind were committed. The population of most of these places was shut up in the church and subjected to the harshest treatment. The same was the case at Pont-Brûlè. Here the parish priest, M. Wouters, for trying to prevent a German soldier from ill-treating an old prisoner, was shot.<sup>11</sup> The parish priest of Beyghem was the victim of vile outrages. The church in his village, like those of Humbeek and Meinsrode, was burnt.<sup>12</sup>

Such were the crimes committed in the district through which the troops of the 1st, 5th, and 6th Divisions advanced to the attack.<sup>13</sup> As for the district where the 2nd and cavalry divisions made their attempt to force the passage of the Malines-Louvain canal, it also suffered considerably at the enemy's hands. It was during the struggle which developed on the Boortmeerbeek-Haecht front that the crime was consummated which will leave an indelible stain on the honour of the German army—the destruction and sack of Louvain.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the facts at Sempst see *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 48; *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, p. 26; Evidence and Documents, d36, d66-d83 (especially d67, d68, d69); "La conduite des troupes allemandes à Sempst-lez-Malines," Note 90 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 125-6, 152.

<sup>3</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, p. 26; Evidence and Documents, d26; *Rapports sur la violation*, etc., ii. p. 24; A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> *Rapports sur la violation*, etc., ii. p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Evidence and Documents, d93.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, p. 26; Evidence and Documents, d84, d85.

<sup>10</sup> Evidence and Documents, d1-d3.

<sup>11</sup> A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, pp. 12-13; Cardinal Mercier's Pastoral Letter.

<sup>12</sup> A. Mélot, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> On the mutilation and massacre of the wounded see *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. pp. 94-6, 98; ii. pp. 29, 130; Evidence and Documents, d93.

<sup>14</sup> Consult, on the sack of Louvain: *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. pp. 29-36, 49 ff., 54, 70-5, 150, 154, 155, ii. p. 114, 116; *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, pp. 29-36; Evidence and Documents, e1-e27; L. H. Grondys, *Les Allemands en Belgique: Louvain et Aerschot*; M. Fuglister, *Louvain, Ville martyre* (Lausanne, 1915); R. Chambry, *La vérité sur Louvain* (Paris, 1915); "La conduite des troupes allemandes à Louvain," report by a Paraguayan priest, an eye-witness (Note 97 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*); report of the Austrian priest Van den Bergh, published in *De Tyd*, 24th-25th August 1915, Nos.

Apart from requisitions and constant vexations, the Germans had committed no excesses in Louvain after their entry on 19th August. They continued to make hostages, who took it in turn to live at the town-hall and were responsible for the behaviour of their fellow-citizens. Every day, in all the churches of the place, an urgent warning was given at the instance of the German authorities, telling the inhabitants to remain calm and promising them, in that case, not to take any more hostages.

The troops which reached the town about 25th August, however, seemed to be animated by a violently anti-clerical spirit. They followed the priests who showed themselves in public with buffoonery, insults, and even threats. They were also very excitable. One day, when a municipal official was taken through the town, preceded by soldiers with drums, and forced to read a proclamation, the Germans hurried up at once from all sides in the hopes of seeing a civilian executed.

The attack by the Belgian 2nd and cavalry divisions on the German positions between Malines and Louvain on the day of 25th August produced considerable excitement in the town. The gun-firing was distinctly heard, and became more violent in the course of the afternoon. It drew closer. The one and only idea in the brains of the

20726-7, reproduced in Note 134 of the *Bureau documentaire belge* [concerning the value of this last evidence see Note 135 of the *Bureau*, on "La valeur probante du rapport de l'enquête ecclésiastique autrichienne"]; Hervé de Gruben, *Les Allemands à Louvain: Récit d'un témoin oculaire* (Paris, 1915); L. Noel, *Louvain*, chapter on the Sack (Oxford, 1915); Ch. Marimé, "Le sac de Louvain: Souvenirs d'un témoin" in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 11th September 1915; J. Thoreau, "The Sack of Louvain," in *The Hampshire Observer*, 21st November 1914; *Témoignage oculaire à Louvain* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1914); account by a Dutch witness and victim in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, morning edition, 31st August 1914; L. Van der Essen, *A Statement about the Destruction of Louvain and Neighbourhood, and Some More News about the Destruction of Louvain* (both Chicago, 1915); R. Narsy, *Le supplice de Louvain: Faits et documents* (Paris, 1915); E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 91-7; R. H. Davies, *With the Allies* (London, 1915), p. 92; "De Duitsche barbaarscheden te Leuven door een ooggetuige verteld," by I. Versluys, librarian of the Séminaire Historique of Louvain, in *De Zeevacht* (Ostend, 26th September 1914, No. 40); "The Sack of Louvain," Madame Nicaud's evidence in the *London Times*, 22nd September 1914; account of the exhumation of bodies of victims in *De Tyd*, 30th January 1915; evidence of J. Bollaers in *De Telegraaf*, 27th April 1915; L. Mokveld, "De beweerde Belgische Franc-Tireur Kryg," in *Vry België* (The Hague), 10th September 1915; H. Davignon, "Les procédés de guerre des Allemands en Belgique," in *Le Correspondant*, 25th January 1915; Cardinal Mercier's Pastoral Letter, Christmas, 1914. See further A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, pp. 29-33, 42-50; H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, pp. 41, 43, 51, 77, 93; L. Mokveld, *The German Fury in Belgium*, pp. 113-31.

German evidence: Diary of the soldier Gaston Klein, 1st company of Landsturm, from Halle—photograph, text, and translation in *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. pp. 178-80; extract from the diary of a soldier cyclist on duty at Burg, 15th August—reproduced by H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 93 (cf. also *Rapports sur la violation*, etc., ii. p. 177).

Many photographed documents will be found in H. Davignon's *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, pp. 40, 42, 74, 76, 98, 104, 108; "German Atrocities on Record," published by *The Field*, 13th February 1915, pp. ix, x, xv, xvi, xvii, xviii; E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*.

As for the German version circulated in the White Book, a critical examination of it may be seen in E. Grimwood Mears, *The Destruction of Belgium*, pp. 28-36, and J. H. Morgan, *German Atrocities*, pp. 15-20; *Réponse au Livre blanc allemand*, ch. v.

people of Louvain was that it was the Allies advancing to recapture Louvain! The inhabitants could no longer restrain their joy. They questioned one another aloud in the streets and shook hands. They listened anxiously to measure the approximate distance of the fighting, consulted carefully preserved military maps, and tried to guess the positions of the armies.

On this day Louvain was crammed with troops. Some 10,000 men had just arrived from Liège and were beginning to take up quarters in the town. A few hundred hussars were coming along the Malines road, covered with dust and leading their horses by the bridles. It was plain that the struggle was not going well for the Germans and that reinforcements were necessary. At the town-hall despatch-bearers followed one another quickly, bringing messages which made the members of the *Kommandantur* anxious. At 5 p.m. firing was heard of particular violence, and seemed to be extremely close to the town. At this moment some horsemen galloped through the streets, giving the alarm. At once officers and soldiers ran together and formed up in a disordered column. Motor-cars were coming and going every way, and ranging themselves up confusedly on the borders of the boulevards. Artillery and commissariat wagons were mixed up with them. Along the roads the horses, lashed till they bled, stiffened themselves and rattled along in a mad dash the guns which were going to reinforce the German troops on the Malines road. As if to raise the confusion to its height, carts were coming back full-tilt and in the greatest disorder from the field of battle, their drivers all excitement, with revolvers in their hands. After the departure of the hastily formed battalions a great silence fell upon the town. In view of the gravity of affairs, everybody had gone home, and soon nothing more was heard except the ever closer and more distinct sound of guns.

Suddenly, at 8 p.m., when twilight had already fallen and every one, in obedience to the rules of the occupying army, had to be already at home, a shot rang out, followed rapidly by two more, and then by a terrible fusillade.<sup>1</sup> This was heard simultaneously at several points of the town, in the Boulevard de Tirlemont, at the Tirlemont Gate, in the Rue de Tirlemont, at the Brussels Gate, in the Rue and Place de la Station, in the Rues Léopold, Marie-Thérèse, and des Joyeuses-Entrées. With the cracking of rifles was mingled the sinister "tactac" of machine guns. The windows of the houses splintered under a hail of bullets, the doors and walls were riddled by the machine guns. In their cellars and other places where they had taken shelter on the first shots the inhabitants heard, through the din, the quick and crowding steps of the soldiers, the noise of whistles followed at once by volleys, and at times the heavy sound of a body falling to the ground. Those who had ventured to go up to their upper stories or attics soon saw the heavens reddened with a dreadful light. The Germans had set fire to several quarters of the town—the Chaussée and Boulevard de Tirlemont, the Place and Rue de la Station, and the Place du Peuple. Soon, too, the Palais de Justice, the University with the celebrated Library, and the Church of St.-Pierre were ablaze, systematically set on fire with faggots and chemicals. Through the streets the German soldiers were running like madmen, firing in

<sup>1</sup> Evidence and Documents, deposition e8.

every direction. Under the orders of their officers, they smashed in the doors of the houses, dragged the inmates from their hiding-places, with cries of "*Man hat geschossen! Die Zivilisten haben geschossen!*" (There has been firing! Civilians have fired!), and hurled hand-grenades and incendiary pastilles into the rooms. Several of the inmates were haled out and instantly shot. Those who tried to escape from their burning houses were thrust back into the flames or butchered like dogs by the soldiers, who were watching along the pavements, with their fingers on the triggers of their rifles. From several of the houses the officers had the objects of value taken out before giving the order to burn them. Every one who showed himself in the street was shot down. In the Rue de la Station an officer on horseback, bursting with rage, was directing the incendiaries.

In the morning certain of the inhabitants, who had passed the night in their cellars or their gardens, ventured to go out. They then learnt that the Germans pretended that a plot had been hatched amongst them, that there had been firing on the troops, and that the whole responsibility for what had happened was thrown on the civilians. From dawn squadrons of soldiers entered the houses, searched them from top to bottom, and turned out the inhabitants, forcing them towards the station. The poor wretches were compelled to run with their hands uplifted. They were given blows with the fists and with rifle-butts. Soon a large number of townspeople were collected in the Place de la Station, where dead bodies of civilians were lying on the ground. During the night a certain number of people had been shot, without serious enquiry. While they were being hustled along, the townspeople were searched by officers and soldiers, and their money was taken from them (some officers gave a receipt in return), as well as any objects of value. Those who did not understand an order, who did not raise their arms quick enough, or who were found carrying knives larger than a penknife, were at once shot. While these horrible scenes were enacted, the guns were constantly booming in the Malines direction, but the noise gradually grew more distant. In the streets numerous civilian corpses lay, and in some places corpses of German soldiers, who had been killed by one another in the night. Victims of panic and obsessed by the thought of francs-tireurs, they had fired on every group which they met in the darkness. Fights of this kind had taken place in the Rue de Bruxelles, near the station, in the Rue de Paris et Vieux-Marché, the Rue des Joyeuses-Entrées, near the canal, and in the Rue de Namur. On all sides lay dead horses. The Germans had unharnessed them from their wagons, driven them into the streets and killed them, to lend belief to an attack by civilians.

As the houses burned and the soldiers continued to loot and to drive the inhabitants down the streets, the townspeople who had been carried off to the station were brutally separated into two groups. The women and children were shut up in the station and the trampled, the men ranged up in the Place de la Station. The Germans selected by haphazard from among them the victims destined to be executed. Some of them had to lie on their stomachs, and were butchered by shots in the head, neck, or back. Others were collected in groups, surrounded by soldiers with fixed bayonets, and carried

off to the outskirts of the town, to the accompaniment of curses, threats, and blows. They were forced to march and countermarch through Herent, Thildonck, Rotselaer, Campenhout, etc. Wherever they went the prisoners saw houses in flames and corpses of civilians stretched on the road or charred by fire. In the country district of Louvain the Germans had committed the same excesses as in the town itself. In order to terrorize them, these groups of prisoners were hunted along the roads, without any precise object except to drive them mad. Sometimes they were made to stop, and a mock shooting took place. They were forced to run, to lift up their arms, etc. Those who fell through fatigue or attempted to escape were slaughtered. When the mournful procession passed through a village they found their ranks swollen by numbers of inhabitants of these places, who had already spent the night in the church. At last, after having thus wandered over the country for hours, several of these groups were taken back to Louvain and put on board cattle-trucks. Piled on to these like cattle, old men, women, children, and able-bodied men were despatched to Germany. We cannot stop to describe the tortures which the deported had to endure on the journey and the cruelties inflicted on them by the fanatical inhabitants of the towns through which they passed. Some were taken to Cologne and exhibited to the crowd; others were sent as far as Münster, where they were interned.

During these explosions of violence on the part of the troops there was no respect of persons. Dutch, Spaniards, South Americans pleaded their neutral status in vain; they were jeered at and subjected to the same outrages as the Belgians. The flags of foreign nations floating over certain houses were no protection to them. The Spanish *pédagogie* in the Rue de la Station was burnt, and in the house of Professor Noyons, of Dutch nationality, a pile of faggots was lighted.

Meanwhile those of the inhabitants who had not fled towards the station, or who had not been driven in that direction, were running madly about the streets. A large number took refuge in the Hospital of Saint-Thomas, in the neighbourhood of the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie. About 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 26th August, the shooting ceased and quiet temporarily returned. A picket of soldiers traversed the streets, taking an unarmed policeman with them to announce that able-bodied men must come together in certain places to help to put out the flames. The civil guards were specially invited to repair, in civilian clothes, to the St.-Martin barracks. All who obeyed the summons were made prisoners and taken, some to the station, bound for Germany, others to the neighbouring villages, where they swelled the troops of prisoners already there. Several groups were taken to Campenhout in particular. After spending the night there, insulted and threatened with death all the time, they were ordered the next day or the day after to Louvain and shut up in the Riding School. There atrocious scenes were witnessed. Women went mad and children died.

On this Wednesday the soldiers started again to fire at intervals, to plunder, and to burn. They could be seen strolling about the town, drunk, laden with bottles of wine, boxes of cigars, and objects of value.

The officers let them do it, roared with laughter, or set the example themselves. The Vice-Rector of the University and the Prior of the Dominicans were led through the town, escorted by soldiers, and forced to stop at certain spots to read a German proclamation warning the people "not to fire again upon the soldiers." A gloomy comedy indeed! In several places soldiers were seen entering the houses and the gardens, firing shots, so as to prolong the mystification and the looting. Some walked along firing phlegmatically into the air. If a house was of fairly good appearance, a group of soldiers would assail it with shouts of "There was firing from here," and at once began to loot.

On the third day, Thursday, the 27th August, some soldiers went through the town in the morning, announcing to the terrified population that Louvain was to be bombarded at noon and that every one must leave at once. Often they added special instructions to go to the station. Those who obeyed these orders were put on to cattle-trucks and sent to join their hapless fellow-citizens in Germany. Others, better advised, took refuge at Heverlé, the property of the Duke of Aremburg, a member of the Prussian House of Lords, who was serving in the German army, and there they were not molested.

Along the Tirlemont and Tervueren roads rolled the wretched flood of fugitives, old men, women, children, invalids, nuns, priests, in a rout which cannot be described. German soldiers followed, compelling the unfortunates to raise their arms, striking them and insulting them. The fury of the Germans raged particularly against the priests. On the Tirlemont road several of them were arrested, taken to a piggery, and stripped of everything. They were accused of having incited the people to revolt, and there was talk of shooting them. One officer, more humane than the rest, had them released. The scenes were the same on the Tervueren road. There the Rector of the University, several ecclesiastical professors, the President of the American Seminary, and a number of Jesuits were treated in a disgraceful fashion and penned in a field. A young Jesuit, Father Dupierreux, on whom was found a diary with notes on the war, some of them very unflattering to the invaders, was shot before the eyes of his colleagues. Certain of these priests were taken to Brussels, where they were at last released. The Rector of the University, some professors and monks were set free through the intervention of a Dutchman, M. Grondys, who was present at the sack of Louvain.

At 11 o'clock on this Thursday, 27th August, the town was as dead. Nothing could be heard to break the profound silence except the sinister crackle of houses on fire. Then, the inhabitants having disappeared, the regular sack began. There was no more talk of bombardment. The sack was organized methodically like the burning, which also continued at the same time. The doors of wardrobes and drawers of desks were smashed with rifle-butts. Safes were broken open with burglars' tools. Every soldier took his pick amid the heap of furniture spread over the floor. Silver-plate, linen, works of art, children's toys, mechanical instruments, pictures—everything was taken. Whatever could not be carried off was broken. The cellars were emptied. Then the looters finished up by depositing their filth in all the corners.

This lasted eight days. Every time fresh troops reached Louvain,



they rushed on their prey. Recalling his entry and his stay at Louvain on 29th August, a Landsturm soldier from Halle wrote in his diary:—

The battalion . . . arrive dragging along with it all sorts of things, particularly bottles of wine, and many of the men were drunk. . . . The battalion set off in close order for the town, to break into the first houses they met, to plunder—I beg pardon, I mean to requisition—wine and other things too. Like a pack let loose, each one went where he pleased. The officers led the way and set a good example.

And Gaston Klein, the soldier in question, concludes:—

This day has inspired me with a contempt I could not describe.

The burning continued, simultaneously with the sack, down to 2nd September. On that day the last houses were set on fire in the Rue Marie-Thérèse. In the evening drunken German soldiers were still dragging to the station heavy bags full of things stolen in the Rue Léopold.

On the afternoon of Friday, 23th August, the Germans committed a particularly odious crime. From 20th August the little town of Aerschot had been abandoned to the mercy of all the troops passing through. The parish priest of Gelrode had been put to death there in barbarous circumstances, and the burning of houses and terrorization of the remaining inhabitants had gone on. On the morning of 28th August a large group of people from Aerschot was carried off in the direction of Louvain. When they reached the Place de la Station they were made to wait, being told that they were to be put on a train and deported to Germany. While the human herd stood there, suddenly, without motive, some enraged soldiers began to fire into the mass. Some were killed and wounded, including women and children. Certain German soldiers, who took two of the wounded to the Hospital of St. Thomas, could not themselves conceal the disgust inspired in them by this barbarous act.

Meanwhile some energetic citizens, among whom was M. Nerinckx, professor of the University, had somehow managed to form a new municipal council, with the help of some members of the old council who had escaped the massacre or had returned after the early days of terror. By their firm attitude they were at last able to obtain from the commandant of the town the cessation of all acts of disorder on the part of the troops.

Such is the story of the sack of Louvain. What was the motive of it? We shall not stop to consider the odious and lying accusation made against the inhabitants by the military authorities and adopted by the Emperor himself in his famous telegram to the President of the United States.<sup>1</sup> It has been reduced to nothing by the evidence of

<sup>1</sup> See the text of this telegram in H. Davignon's *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 105. This version was circulated also in the manifesto of the 93 German professors and "intellectuals." See A. Morel-Fatio's *Les versions allemande et française du manifeste des intellectuels allemands, dit des quatre-vingt-treize*, Paris, 1915. The accusation is taken up officially in the German White Book of 10th May 1915: *Anlage D: Der Belgischer Volksaufstand in Löwen*. Concerning these accusations see "La légende de la guerre des francs-tireurs en Belgique," Note 118 of the *Bureau documentaire belge*, and especially the report of the Austrian priest mentioned above.

disinterested neutrals and by the enquiries of an Austrian priest, made on the spot.

In Louvain itself the following explanation is given. On the night of 25th August, at the moment when soldiers and vehicles were coming back in disorder from Malines, some shots rang out. The German soldiers in the town imagined, some that the enemy was coming, others that the civilians were beginning an attack. The former fired on their own comrades, taking them for Belgian or French soldiers; the latter riddled the fronts of the houses with bullets. The supposition is that there was a mistake, and then a panic.

It must be the truth with regard to a great number of German soldiers. We have already said that the soldiers quartered in Louvain seemed very nervous, that the troops who flocked back into the town during the battle were very excited; and, on the other hand, it is established that during the night several groups of Germans fired on one another in the streets. In such a state of mind, constantly haunted by visions of francs-tireurs, the German soldiers were very liable to sudden panic. A single shot was sufficient to produce it. We have the histories of Aerschot, Liège, Namur, and above all Andenne, to guide us on the subject.

Now, the evidence of witnesses establishes that a few moments before the fusillade began a shot was heard, followed immediately by two others. By whom was this shot fired? That will probably never be known. Was it fired by an unnerved sentry, by a drunken soldier, by a civilian? Considering the numerous warnings given to the townspeople, the threats of the Germans themselves, the excited state of the troops returning to the town, and the numbers of the soldiers in the garrison, it is very unlikely that a civilian would have been guilty of this act of folly, knowing that thereby he was exposing the whole population to nameless horrors. The fate of Aerschot was in every one's memory. Those events were recent.<sup>1</sup>

If the first shot was fired by a German soldier, did that soldier act with the intention of starting a catastrophe? Was he obeying superior orders, and was he giving the signal for the carrying out of a German military "plot"?

Some have replied to the German accusation with a charge of premeditation on the part of the invaders. Louvain must have been condemned in advance, they say, and the attack of the Belgian troops on 25th August can only have hastened the execution of the plan.

History, while rejecting the German accusation, will demand serious proofs before accepting the victims' counter-accusation of German premeditation. Doubtless the German methods of terrorization do not entirely exclude the possibility of systematic and premeditated destruction of a town. But did this premeditation exist positively in this one particular case of Louvain? That is the whole question.

After carefully examining the mass of documents within our reach, we believe we may say that, in the present state of the evidence, it is impossible to consider proved the charge of premeditation with regard to Louvain—premeditation signifying to us the plan conceived long beforehand of giving Louvain up to the flames.

<sup>1</sup> On the mental condition of the civil population see L. H. Grondys, *Les Allemands en Belgique*, p. 77 ff.

No doubt there are singular facts which, at first sight, seem to justify the defenders in their hypothesis of German premeditation. The fusillade breaking out almost simultaneously at several points some distance apart, the several centres of incendiarism started at the same time, the presence of a company of incendiaries armed with up-to-date appliances, the luminous signals said to have been sent up a few moments before the fusillade began, certain remarks let drop by soldiers or officers, the removal of the German wounded on the eve of the disaster, the warnings given long in advance to the inhabitants living in places 20 to 30 kilometres away from Louvain by soldiers or officers—the whole setting of the drama, taken in its entirety, cannot fail to be suspicious.

Still, when one examines the weight of these facts, one by one, many of them lose their conclusive force. The data are not precise enough or are insufficiently established; the facts and the words themselves seem capable of different interpretations.

On the other side, certain facts seem to negative premeditation, in the sense which we attach to the word. It is established that many soldiers, and even officers, believed for a moment that "the French were there." On the hypothesis of a preconceived plan, would they not have understood that the first shots were the signal for the massacre? At the start, and in the night, the Germans fired upon one another; there can be no doubt of that. This can be easily understood on the hypothesis of a panic, less easily on that of a German plot.

We therefore exclude, provisionally, the supposition of a German plot, conceived long before its execution. It does not seem to us proved by the documents published so far.

What we do not exclude is the hypothesis of premeditation on the part of the soldiers. In the state of excitement in which they were, particularly those coming back in disorder from Malines, they may have fired a shot, knowing that "the rest" would follow.<sup>1</sup> This story was repeated so often in other places that we have the right to apply it hypothetically in the case of Louvain.

There is more. On the night of the 25th and the following days, certain soldiers and non-commissioned officers fired shots,<sup>2</sup> so as to have a pretext for continuing the pillage. Many of the soldiers and officers may have believed<sup>3</sup> at the beginning, for a few moments, that they were being attacked by the enemy entering the town or that a civilian attack was taking place. But this mistake cannot have lasted long. It remains established that, in cold blood and without any idea of a serious enquiry, the military authorities persisted in the error and subjected Louvain to eight days' martyrdom, without raising a finger to stop the orgy. Whether the responsibility falls upon Major Von Manteuffel or must be referred back to the highest personalities in the Empire does not matter. It is the prolonged sack of the town,

<sup>1</sup> There were at Louvain soldiers of the 165th Infantry Regiment, which committed, as we have seen, the worst excesses in the villages around Liège. See the photograph given by H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> At Professor Verhelst's house; before the houses of Professors Dupriez and Noel; before the Hospital of St. Thomas.—Declaration of the Rector of the University in regard to the Rue de Namur.

without previous enquiry, which makes what has been called "the crime of Louvain" so enormous.

Such an enquiry was possible. The example of Huy proves that. On 25th August Major Von Bassewitz, commandant of that place, published the following order of the day:—

25th August 1914.

Last night shooting took place. It has not been proved that the inhabitants of the town were still in possession of arms. Nor has it been proved that the civil population took part in the shooting; on the contrary, it would seem that the soldiers were under the influence of alcohol and opened fire under an incomprehensible fear of an enemy attack.

The conduct of the soldiers during the night produces a shameful impression, with a few exceptions.

When officers or non-commissioned officers set fire to houses, without permission or order from the commandant, or in the present case from the senior officer, and when they encourage the troops by their attitude to burn and loot, it is an act of the most regrettable kind.

I expect severe instructions to be given generally as to the attitude towards the life and property of the civil population. I forbid firing in the town without officers' orders.

The bad conduct of the troops has had as its result the serious wounding of a non-commissioned officer and a soldier by German shots.

VON BASSEWITZ, Major,  
Commandant.'

If this had been the state of mind of the military authorities in Louvain, it is certain that there would not have been the horrors which we have described above. We cannot help thinking that the military authorities, when once the machine was accidentally thrown out of gear, were not at all annoyed. They took care not to give the necessary sign to avert the consequences.

How many victims were there at Louvain? We do not know. The Capuchin Father Valère Claes himself discovered 108, of whom 96 had been shot, the others having perished in the ruins of the houses. In his Pastoral Letter, Cardinal Mercier speaks of 176 persons shot or burnt in the whole neighbourhood of Louvain and the adjoining communes. With regard to material destruction, 1,120 houses were burnt in the area of the commune of Louvain, 461 in the adjacent commune of Kessel-Loo, and 95 in that of Héverlé, these three parts making up the urban district of Louvain.<sup>2</sup> In Louvain itself, apart from private houses, fire destroyed the Church of St.-Pierre, the central University buildings, the Palais de Justice, the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the theatre, and the School of Commercial and Consular Science belonging to the University.

The Church of St.-Pierre was methodically set on fire,<sup>3</sup> as was the University Library.<sup>4</sup> A Josephite Father called the attention of the officer in command of the incendiaries to the fact that the building which he was about to set on fire was the Library. The officer replied,

<sup>1</sup> Communicated by M. Vandervelde, the Belgian Minister. Cf. L. Mokveld, *The German Fury in Belgium*, pp. 148-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> See the evidence given by Grondys (p. 54), the Austrian priest, and Hervé de Gruben (pp. 126-7).

<sup>4</sup> Concerning the treasures which perished in this fire, see P. Delannoy, Professor and Librarian of Louvain, *L'Université de Louvain*, Paris, 1915, pp. 201-22. Cf. L. Van der Essen, "La Bibliothèque de l'Université de Louvain" in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* (Manchester), April 1915, p. 139 ff.

"*Es ist Befehl*" (It is ordered). It was then about 11 p.m. on Tuesday, 25th August.

This was not the end, however, of the excesses committed by the Germans during the first sortie of the Belgian troops from Antwerp. The region round Louvain and the villages situated between this town and Malines were engulfed in the "punishment." Bueken, Gelrode, Herent, Wespelaer, Rymenam, Wygmael, Tremeloo, Werchter, Wesemael, Wackerzeel, Blauwput, Thildonck, Rillaer, Wilsele, Linden, Betecom, Haecht were partly burnt and plundered, a number of the inhabitants being shot.<sup>1</sup> Others were dragged along for many hours, loaded with insults, used as shields against the enemy's troops during the battle, and finally chased in the direction of the Belgian lines. Some were thrown into wells after being horribly ill-treated. Here, too, the German soldiers were bitter against the priests. The Rev. Father Van Holm, a Capuchin, and Father Vincent, a Conventual; Lombaerts, parish priest of Boven-Loo; de Clerck, parish priest of Bueken, and Van Bladel, parish priest of Herent, were killed, as also were a Josephite Father and a Brother of Mercy. The parish priests of Wygmael and Wesemael were shamefully treated. Finally, in this neighbourhood the Germans committed the same outrages against women and young girls as in the neighbourhood of Hofstade, Sempst, etc. Crimes of a Sadic character were also found. Neither old men, women, nor children were respected.<sup>2</sup>

The picture would not be complete if we did not speak of the attack of a special kind made on the town of Antwerp on the night of 24th-25th August, while the Belgian army was preparing to assault the German lines.

This night, at 1.11, a Zeppelin appeared over sleeping Antwerp and carried out its deadly work. From his room in the Hôtel St.-Antoine, Mr. Powell, the American war correspondent whose evidence we have often cited previously, witnessed the arrival of the Zeppelin. He was preparing to go to bed when, he says—

My attention was attracted by a curious humming overhead, like a million bumblebees. I leaned far out of the window, and as I did so an indistinct mass, which gradually resolved itself into something resembling a gigantic black cigar, became plainly apparent against the purple-velvet sky. . . . As it drew nearer the noise, which had at first reminded me of a swarm of angry bees, grew louder, until it sounded like an automobile with the muffler open. Despite the darkness, there was no doubting what it was. It was a German Zeppelin.

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Mercier's Pastoral Letter, Christmas, 1914; *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. annexe 1. See also, in detail, for Bueken, *Rapports sur la violation*, etc., i. p. 128; Evidence and Documents, c64, d96-8; A. Mélot, *Le martyre du clergé belge*, p. 11; report by the Paraguayan priest on Louvain, mentioned above. For Gelrode, *Rapports*, etc., ii. p. 112; Evidence and Documents, c23-6, c40; report by Paraguayan priest. For Herent, *Rapports*, etc., i. p. 104; Evidence and Documents, d97; A. Mélot, p. 25. For Wesemael, Mélot, pp. 25-6. For Rotselaer, Mélot, pp. 26-33; Evidence and Documents, c51. For Wygmael, *Rapports*, etc., i. p. 104, ii. p. 116. For Wilsele, Evidence and Documents, d129. For Wespelaer, *ibid.*, c60-63. For Boortmeerbeek, *ibid.*, d94, d105. For Haecht, *ibid.*, d100-4. For Werchter, *ibid.*, d110. See also Evidence and Documents, d131, and the Report of the Rockefeller Commission, published in the *New York Times* and as a separate pamphlet, 14th February 1915.

<sup>2</sup> See the sources quoted in the previous note.

Even as I looked, something resembling a falling star curved across the sky. An instant later came a rending, shattering crash that shook the hotel to its foundations; the walls of my room rocked and reeled about me, and for a breathless moment I thought that the building was going to collapse. Perhaps thirty seconds later came another splitting explosion, and another, and then another—ten in all—each, thank Heaven, a little farther removed.<sup>1</sup>

Bombs fell on the Rue de la Bourse, the Poids Public, the Rues des Escrimeurs, Von Bary, and de la Justice, on the barracks of the Place Falcon, and in the courtyard of the Hospital. Ten civilians were killed, including six women, and more than forty wounded. Of the latter, two died of their wounds.<sup>2</sup>

"There is very little doubt," says Mr. Powell, "that a deliberate attempt was made to kill the Royal Family, the General Staff, and the members of the Government, one shell bursting within a hundred yards of the Royal Palace, where the King and Queen were sleeping, and another within two hundred yards of Staff Headquarters and the Hôtel St.-Antoine."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-6. See, too, the photographs showing the effects of the explosion, especially at the Hospital.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE BOMBARDMENT OF MALINES—THE GERMANS IN FLANDERS— TERMONDE—MELLE

(27th August—9th September)

In their retreat after the first sortie from Antwerp to the protection of the guns of the advanced forts, the Belgians completely evacuated the town of Malines, which thus remained exposed to the enemy's blows.<sup>1</sup> On the day after the Belgian troops' return to their lines, the Germans began the bombardment of the defenceless place.<sup>2</sup> Their batteries, some of them posted at Campenhout and Boortmeerbeek, sent shell after shell into the town. At this moment Malines was as deserted as a cemetery,<sup>3</sup> the few remaining inhabitants keeping themselves hidden at home to escape the results of the bombardment. The German batteries directed particular attention to the beautiful tower of the cathedral and the cathedral itself. The great belfry was destroyed, the fine stained glass was pierced by bombs, charming architectural ornaments were shattered, and shells falling through the roof caused considerable damage to the interior.<sup>4</sup> The bombardment began on 27th August and was continued at intervals. It was violent on 2nd September and recommenced on 27th September, on the eve of the definite occupation of the town by the Germans, when about to begin the attack on Antwerp.<sup>5</sup>

Up to this point the town had been visited by parties of cavalry and small detachments of Germans. They devoted themselves to pillaging the deserted houses and committed some revolting atrocities, of which the victims were women and children.<sup>6</sup> These marauders sometimes fell in with Belgian patrols, penetrating into the town on their side. In the course of one of these skirmishes there occurred one event worthy of mention. A young volunteer of sixteen, named Boonen, was on patrol duty with a comrade south of the town on 6th September. A small German detachment came down upon them. In the fight which followed Boonen had his shoulder pierced by a

<sup>1</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 56; E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Rapports*, etc., i. pp. 56, 98, 105; E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 156 ff.; Geoffrey Young, *From the Trenches*, p. 135 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Compare the descriptions of Messrs. Powell and Young in the works mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> Powell, p. 156; Young, pp. 136-7, *Rapports*, etc., i. p. 105. See the photographs in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 48; in "German Atrocities on Record," p. xix; in *The Illustrated War News*, London, part 11, p. 3; and in Powell's *Fighting in Flanders*.

<sup>5</sup> J. Buchan, *History of the War*, ii. p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Evidence and Documents, d4, d5, d7, d9, and d136.

bullet, while his comrade fell some fifty yards away from him, hit full in the breast. The Germans approached the two wounded. Boonen shammed death. One of the soldiers gave him a blow in the face with the rifle-butt, while the others turned his pockets out. When the enemy had gone, Boonen crawled as far as his comrade, succeeded in lifting him up with the aid of his unwounded arm, and brought him back to his company after a painful journey of nearly two miles.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time as Malines, the inoffensive little commune of Heyst-op-den-Berg was bombarded,<sup>2</sup> and a uhlan there killed a small girl of two in her mother's arms.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile General Von Boehn, in command of the 9th Reserve Corps, had sent numerous cavalry reconnaissances in the direction of the two Flanders. This part of Belgium was swarming with small uhlan and hussar patrols, whose duty was to discover whether there were Belgian troops in these regions, and especially whether there were any signs of British troops, which might have landed on the coast. As in the Liège, Limbourg, and Brabant neighbourhoods, these horsemen spread panic through the villages by their mere appearance. Still, they never committed excesses of the sort which accompanied their raids in Eastern Belgium in the month of August.

Some of these patrols ventured very far. Thus one of them reached Snaeskerke, close to Ostend, where it fell in with a party of Belgian gendarmes. A sharp skirmish ensued, in the course of which the gendarmes distinguished themselves greatly. The patrol was compelled to retire. A strong contingent of civil guards was sent in pursuit of it, but it escaped and disappeared.

On 27th August a body of British marines, some two thousand strong, was landed in Ostend and established itself in the neighbourhood. Their mission probably was to prevent a sudden attack on the town.<sup>4</sup> However, they did not remain long, and left after a few days.

On 4th September, the 9th Reserve Corps started from Assche and set out for France. The main body of the corps made for Audenarde and Renaix, but a portion made a diversion north-west and marched on Termonde.<sup>5</sup> Following the Brussels road, it reached Lebbeke about 4 a.m. Lebbeke was defended by weak Belgian forces, which, in face of the enemy's superiority, fell back on the Scheldt after a short struggle. At seven o'clock the Germans entered the commune, breaking the windows, smashing in the doors, chasing out the women and children, and driving before them the men, whom they dragged from their homes. Shortly afterwards the place was subjected to a bombardment, which damaged the church rather seriously. Then the soldiers started to loot and burn, a score of houses and farms being destroyed by the flames.<sup>6</sup> The intervention of the burgomaster with the commandant, however, saved the commune from complete destruction. The parish priest, curate, town clerk, notary, and a number of inhabitants were arrested and sent to Germany. Three

<sup>1</sup> "Frères d'armes," by A. P. F., in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 14th January 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. pp. 56, 98.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> On 27th August the British Press Bureau announced that these troops had been landed for reasons which seemed sufficient to the War Office and Admiralty.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> See 9<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports)*, i. p. 110 ff.)



of these prisoners were killed on the journey. Twelve people who had taken refuge in a farm during the battle were tied together and massacred behind the building, their bodies being thrown into the same grave.<sup>1</sup>

The township of St.-Gilles was treated with the same savagery. A great portion of the neighbourhood was burnt. Six of the inhabitants were tied arm to arm, dragged to Lebbeke, and put to death in a barbarous manner. Other prisoners had their heads split open before the eyes of their families.<sup>2</sup>

At Termonde there were no Belgian troops left, the last outposts having retired across the Scheldt. As he approached the town, the commander of the German troops addressed the following summons to "the commandant of Termonde" and the burgomaster:—

The Germans have taken Termonde. We have placed all round the town siege artillery of the highest calibre. Still people are daring to fire on some of the German troops. The town and fortress are summoned to hoist the white flag immediately and to cease fighting. If you do not at once obey our summons, the town will be razed to the ground by a tremendous bombardment.

All the armed forces in Termonde must deposit their arms at once at the Brussels Gate on the southern entrance to Termonde. The arms of the inhabitants must be deposited at the same time and place.

The General commanding the German troops before Termonde,

VON BOEHN.<sup>3</sup>

This grandiloquent proclamation, addressed to the inhabitants of an open town, was a mere piece of buffoonery.

Termonde did not resist, the last Belgian soldier having left the old city with its dismantled ramparts. Nevertheless, at 9.15 the Germans threw a few shells into the town, which hit about fifteen houses. An hour later they decided to enter. They began by killing two inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> "Some civilians fired on us," declared the commandant to one of the municipal councillors; "we are going to burn the town." "No one has fired. How can you know, when you have not yet penetrated into the town?" "There was firing from the church tower."<sup>5</sup> "The church is locked." "Then there was firing from the Bank." "All the employees have left." "Anyhow, there was firing on our troops outside the town." "Since when have the inhabitants of Termonde been responsible for what goes on outside the town?" "*Das ist mir gleich!*" (That is all the same to me!), declared the German, putting an end to the conversation.<sup>6</sup>

The soldiers spread through the town, making prisoners of the men who fell into their hands.<sup>7</sup> They forced them to march through the streets with their arms uplifted, searched them, struck them with rifle-

<sup>1</sup> The 9th Report gives the victims' names.

<sup>2</sup> See 9th Report again.

<sup>3</sup> See 7<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, ii. p. 85)*.

<sup>4</sup> See 9th Report; also Evidence and Documents, f4, f5.

<sup>5</sup> A witness stated that the church tower of St.-Gilles was occupied by some Belgian soldiers armed with a machine gun. Cf. Evidence and Documents, f2.

<sup>6</sup> This conversation is reported by M. Pierre Verhaeghen, of the *Bien Public* of Ghent, who investigated matters at Termonde itself.

<sup>7</sup> For what follows, see the already cited 9th Report and Evidence and Documents, f1 and following testimonies. See also *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, pp. 36-7.

butts, and stuck their bayonets into some who did not walk fast enough. A group of these prisoners was taken to Lebbeke and shut up in the church. Another was brought to a field and kept under watch until evening. A great number of these civilians, nearly 450 from the districts of Lebbeke and St.-Gilles and the town of Termonde, were deported to Germany. At the Civil Hospital hostages were taken, including the president of the Red Cross Society and the chaplain and secretary of the Hospital Committee.

Meanwhile bands of soldiers were looting the cellars and the shops of pastrycooks, bakers, grocers, and wine merchants. Bottles were soon all over the streets. A company under the orders of a captain visited the premises of the Banque Centrale de la Dendre. A special gang forced open a small safe in the deputy manager's office and took 2,100 fr. from it.<sup>1</sup> In the vaults the second door, which gave access to the safes of private individuals, resisted all efforts to break it down. In the meantime the German general was posing in front of a camera on the steps of the town-hall.

About 3 p.m. the pioneers of the 9th Corps set fire to the builders' yards and four groups of fifteen houses. Now the German officers invited the inhabitants remaining in the town to leave it, as Termonde was to be destroyed. About five the prisoners in the gaol, to the number of over 135, were set at liberty.

Next day the incendiary (pioneer) company began its grim work, under the orders of Major Von Sommerfeld. The latter was sitting on a chair in the middle of the Grand' Place, when he saw approaching him the burgomaster, who begged him to spare the town. "*Nein! Rasieren!*" (No, we are going to raze it to the ground!) was the answer.<sup>2</sup> The destruction was carried out with up-to-date instruments.<sup>3</sup> The pioneers brought little red kegs filled with petrol. In the houses where they could easily enter they went up to the first floor, sprinkled the beds, floors, and curtains, and then set them alight.<sup>4</sup> For the other houses, men wearing pneumatic belts filled them from some central reservoirs of incendiary liquids, which they sprayed on to the exterior woodwork. Then another man, having a special glove smeared with phosphorus, rubbed the woodwork and so set it all on fire. It took no more than a quarter of an hour to burn a street.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, yet another method was used. A hole was bored through a bole or a shutter. A receptacle fitted with a pump and filled with benzine was brought, and the liquid was projected into the interior by a tube.<sup>6</sup> Through the holes were next thrown incendiary pastilles, composed of gelatinized nitrocellulose.<sup>7</sup> An explosion and a blaze followed instantly. The Hospital was not spared, though a promise

<sup>1</sup> See the photographs in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> P. Nothomb, *The Barbarians in Belgium*, London, 1915, p. 166. This detail is taken from the dossier of the Belgian Commission of Inquiry.

<sup>3</sup> On the pioneer companies and their methods of "work," see an excellent chapter in *The Barbarians in Belgium*, pp. 229-44.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence of M. Pierre Verhaeghen.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Belgian military authorities, 19th September 1914.

<sup>6</sup> Evidence of M. Pierre Verhaeghen. See the photographed documents in *The Illustrated War News*, London, part 7, p. 26, and H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 52. See in the latter work also, p. 53, M. de Rudder's report, giving the chemical analysis of the incendiary pastilles and the explanation how they were used.

<sup>7</sup> 9th Report, cited above; Evidence and Documents, f3

had been made the previous evening not to touch it. The mother superior of the establishment was ordered to leave it, with the nursing sisters and the sick. Scarcely had the last patient quitted the building when it took fire. One epileptic was caught in the blazing furnace.<sup>1</sup> So great was the heat that it was necessary to wrap the sick in wet sheets. The head doctor of the hospital indignantly remarked to a German military doctor: "This is not humane!" "It is war," replied the other.<sup>2</sup>

The Beguines' Church, late sixteenth-century work, was also set on fire. The door of that of St.-Gilles *intra muros* being too stout to be forced or broken in, this building escaped destruction.

On Sunday, 6th September, Von Sommerfeld ordered the work of destruction to be continued.<sup>3</sup>

For choice, fire was set to the rich quarters, as at Louvain—the pillage in these being more profitable—but the more humble houses also received attention. Some houses were spared, being protected by the inscription: *Nicht anzünden* (Not to be set on fire).

On 7th September the incendiarism stopped. The pioneers were called away to destroy the railroads. "There is nothing more to be feared," said a soldier on Sunday evening; "the pioneers have gone. The fire is not our business."<sup>4</sup>

During Saturday the German soldiers had continued the pillage. A jeweller's shop and several private houses were completely sacked.

On 4th September the little village of Appels, north-west of Termonde, was bombarded for an hour, though not a single Belgian soldier was there. A child was killed by a splinter of shrapnel. A few minutes after the bombardment the German soldiers invaded the place, burnt nine houses and sacked some others. The parish priest and villagers were shut up for an hour and a half in the church.<sup>5</sup>

In the afternoon of Saturday, 5th September, the Germans invaded also the village of Baesrode, took 250 men prisoners, and kept them in a field until the following morning. Three men were killed. A number of houses were looted. When they left on Monday, the soldiers took with them some thirty men, including one of seventy. These prisoners were in all probability deported to Germany.<sup>6</sup>

During the destruction of Termonde a German military doctor wrote from Lebbeke the following letter,<sup>7</sup> which well illustrates the mental state of the troops occupying this district:—

DEAR AUNT EMMA,

. . . I have gradually become so used to war that everything seems to me natural. One is astonished sometimes when one passes a village which has not been

<sup>1</sup> Evidence of M. Pierre Verhaeghen.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> With regard to the destruction of Termonde, photographed documents may be seen in the book of the American war correspondent, E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*; in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, pp. 40, 46, 52; in *The Illustrated War News*, part 6, pp. 40, 46, 47, and part 7, p. 26; and in *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence of M. Pierre Verhaeghen. Cf. also P. Nothomb, *The Barbarians in Belgium*, p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> *9<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête* (*Rapports*, i. pp. 112-13).

<sup>6</sup> Evidence and Documents, f6.

<sup>7</sup> The photograph of the original and the full text of the translation may be seen in H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, pp. 102-3. The letter is dated Lebbeke, 6th September 1914, and is signed "Your Fritz."

burnt, when one has not to march at midnight, when a day goes by without one seeing a franc-tireur shot. In the evening one sits at one's ease at the table, and eats the black bread and bacon and drinks the red wine which belonged to a shot parish priest, and one rejoices to see how well the houses from which there has been firing blaze up. We sleep nearly all of us together. If we are not sufficiently protected, we keep our loaded revolvers at our sides. I have not yet used mine, but it is not advisable to take a walk without one. Our captain, who, to tell the truth, is excessively prudent, even takes with him as a protection two stretcher-bearers, armed with revolvers and carbines, if it is necessary for him to go at night to a solitary spot.

It may be seen that it is always the same haunting fear of franc-tireurs, the same suspicious spirit entertained by the officers and communicated to the men, which induces the invaders to butcher, on the slightest suspicion, innocent and perfectly inoffensive people.

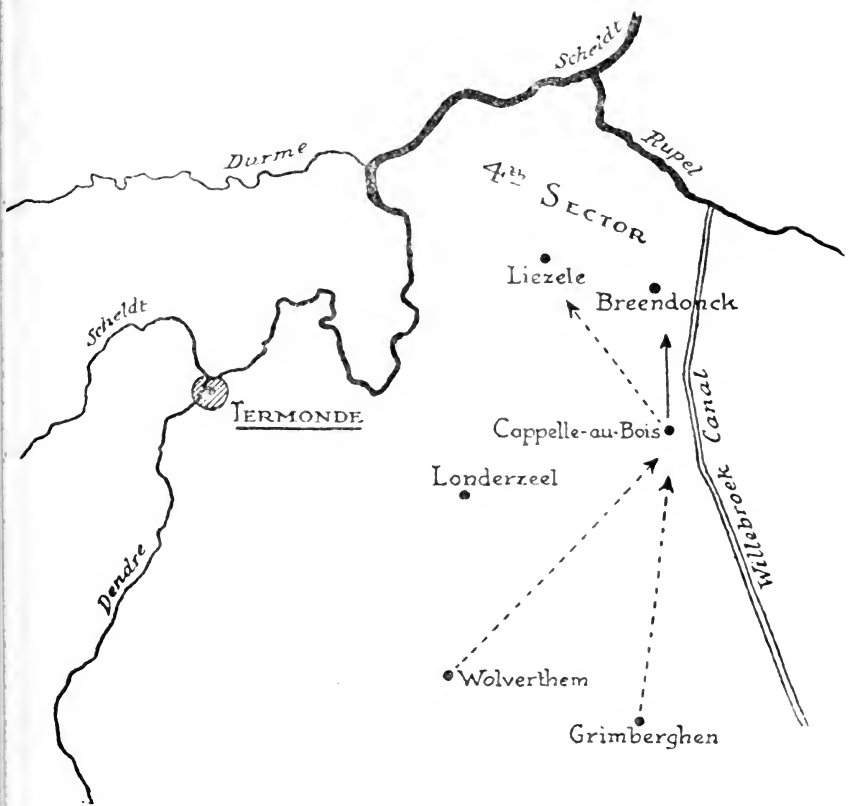
Learning of the enemy's march on Termonde, the Belgian High Command had taken steps to prevent the Germans, while crossing the Scheldt at this place, from endangering the communications of the Belgian army with the west, and above all with the coast. Some units were despatched towards Termonde by the north, while the 5th Division, which still occupied the fourth sector of the position at Antwerp, pushed detachments south-west in the direction of Buggenhout. The 16th Brigade, assembled on the muster-ground at Pullaer, west of Willebroeck, was also waiting to be ordered to Termonde, when it was learnt that the enemy was advancing to attack the fourth sector.<sup>1</sup>

It was probably with the object of protecting the progress of destruction at Termonde, and preventing the Belgian troops from interrupting Von Sommerfeld's incendiaries at work, that the general commanding the German forces hurled a part of the 3rd Reserve Corps against the Belgian positions in the fourth sector.

Starting from Grimbergen and Wolverthem, the Germans first met a Belgian advanced post near Capelle-au-Bois. This was composed of a battalion of the 6th Chasseurs à pied, supported by six machine guns of the 1st Brigade. A brisk and murderous fire received the enemy and inflicted heavy losses on him. It was not until the Germans had obtained artillery support and considerable effective reinforcement that they could overcome the resistance of the Belgians. Further, the enemy embarked on an enveloping movement by way of Londerzeel. So the Belgian detachment fell back on the outposts of the fourth sector, on the Liezele-Breendonck line, but not before the fire of its rifles and machine guns had mown down the ranks of the assailants at close range.

In slow but determined pursuit, the enemy came up to the outposts of the fourth sector. Confident in their numerical superiority, the Germans opened the fight and strove to cut a way between Liezele and Breendonck. Although furiously cannonaded and fiercely assailed, the Belgians stood firm. Suddenly the fortress artillery began to thunder forth. It was the first time that the gunners in the cupolas were able to direct their guns against the enemy, which they did with heartfelt joy. With the rumbling of the heavy pieces mingled the angry barking of the 5th Division's batteries. There was a wholesale massacre of the

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 9th October 1915.



THE FIRST ATTACK ON ANTIWERP'S DEFENCES.

assailants, who could be seen falling in heaps in front of the Belgian lines.<sup>1</sup>

The Germans soon beat a retreat, after suffering sanguinary losses. Once more inoffensive civilians had to pay for the defeat. Passing again through Capelle-au-Bois, where the first fighting had taken place, the enemy set it on fire.

The chasseurs of the 16th Brigade, who were on outpost duty on the night of the 4th-5th September, saw the horizon lit up with a sinister glow. Capelle-au-Bois was burning. Fanned by the wind, the flames whirled and danced in the night. Sparks fell near the advanced sentries, whose throats were choked with the acrid smoke of the fire. Silently, with their eyes fixed on the furnace, swallowing down their impotent anger, the Belgians watched the work of destruction.<sup>2</sup>

On Saturday, 5th September, while Von Sommerfeld was finishing the burning of Termonde, a skirmish took place at Oordeghem, of no importance in itself, but worthy of record in that those who distinguished themselves in it were members of the citizen militia, cyclist-chasseurs of the Brussels civic guard.

These cyclists, after their departure from Brussels on the night of 19th August, had fallen back by stages as far as St.-Nicolas. Then, scouting through the country in advance, they had returned towards Brussels. They were seen passing by Termonde and Alost. On 28th August they scattered German patrols at Wolverthem and Merchtem. On 4th September, having found some German hussars near Oordeghem, between Ghent and Alost, the commander asked for volunteers to push right up to the village and observe the presence of enemy troops. He started on the 5th with seventeen volunteers. Approaching the village, the cyclists were warned that comparatively numerous forces had just arrived. As they were exposed in a hollow, where the enemy could easily command them with his fire, they were getting ready to retire a little to a more favourable spot, when the enemy appeared. To the cyclists' left, along a parallel lane, fifty German cavalry defiled, riding two and two. Soon they came back; but now they were only twenty-six in number. The Belgians understood. The others had gone to post themselves on their line of retreat. The Germans numbered in all two hundred men. The Brussels cyclists were only seventeen; a few gendarmes and three lancers had joined them. They prepared to sell their lives dearly, and they succeeded in doing so in the ensuing fight. They continued to fire until they were completely surrounded. Commandant Koninck fell dead, and several were wounded. The Belgians managed to get away, running the gauntlet of the uhlan's fire from ambush on both sides of their line of retreat. They had four killed and five wounded, but they had killed nine Germans and wounded forty.

In the afternoon they returned to pick up the Commandant's body. They found the corpse mutilated and robbed of the silver and any objects of value there had been on it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire," etc., in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 9th October 1915. See also *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 70-5; R. P. Hénusse, *A la première attaque du camp retranché d'Anvers*, in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 120-5.

<sup>2</sup> "Pages de gloire," etc., loc. cit.; 15<sup>e</sup> *Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports)*, ii. p. 26).

<sup>3</sup> "Le combat d'Oordeghem," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 7th September 1914.

While a portion of Von Boehn's troops were sacking Termonde, another portion advanced on Ghent. On reaching Melle, the Germans met some Belgian territorial troops, battalions of volunteers and civic guards.<sup>1</sup> A fairly sharp engagement followed, in the course of which the civic guards were obliged to retire precipitately, leaving six guns on the road. The volunteer grenadiers rushed forward under a murderous fire and succeeded in rolling the guns along by hand and so putting them out of the enemy's reach. During the fight the Germans made the villagers come out of their houses—men, women, and children—and drove them along before them. Several of them were hit.<sup>2</sup> After the fight the Germans set fire to a part of Melle and entrenched themselves temporarily in the neighbourhood, at Beleghem, before continuing the march on Ghent.<sup>3</sup>

The burgomaster of Ghent, wishing to save the town from occupation by the German troops, parleyed with the enemy commandant and arrived at a settlement, by the terms of which the Germans agreed not to enter Ghent on condition that the Belgian troops should not occupy it, that the civic guard should be disbanded and surrender its arms, and that the municipality should supply a precisely regulated quantity of provisions, including 100,000 cigars.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile the main body of the 9th Corps made off rapidly in the direction of France, taking Audenarde and Renaix on the way. An American war correspondent, who saw them at close quarters, thus describes the appearance of these troops:—

Half a mile or so from Sotteghem our road debouched into the great highway which leads through Lille to Paris, and we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of the German army. It was a sight never to be forgotten. Far as the eye could see stretched solid columns of marching men, pressing westward, ever westward. The army was advancing in three mighty columns along three parallel roads, the dense masses of moving men in their elusive grey-green uniforms looking for all the world like three monstrous serpents crawling across the country-side. . . .

For five solid hours, travelling always at express-train speed, we motored between walls of marching men. . . . It seemed that the interminable ranks would never end, and, so far as we were concerned, they never did end, for we never saw the head of that mighty column. We passed regiment after regiment, brigade after brigade of infantry; then hussars, cuirassiers, uhlands, field batteries, more field guns, ambulances with staring red crosses painted on their canvas tops; then gigantic siege guns, their grim muzzles pointing skywards, each drawn by thirty straining horses; engineers, sappers and miners with picks and spades, pontoon wagons, carts piled high with what looked like masses of yellow silk but which proved to be balloons, bicyclists with carbines slung upon their backs hunter fashion, aeroplane outfits, bearded and spectacled doctors of the medical corps, armoured motor-cars with curved steel rails above them as a protection against the wires which the Belgians were in the habit of stringing across the roads; battery after battery of pom-poms (as the quick-firers are descriptively called), and after them more batteries of spidery-looking, lean-barrelled machine guns, more uhlands—the sunlight gleaming on their lance-tips and the breeze fluttering their pennons into a black and white cloud above them—and then infantry in spiked and linen-covered helmets, more infantry, and still more infantry—all sweeping by, irresistibly as a mighty river, with their faces turned towards France.<sup>5</sup>

There indeed, in the smiling valleys of the Marne, a tremendous battle was on foot. The German troops had just been driven back by the armies of General Joffre and were retreating precipitately.

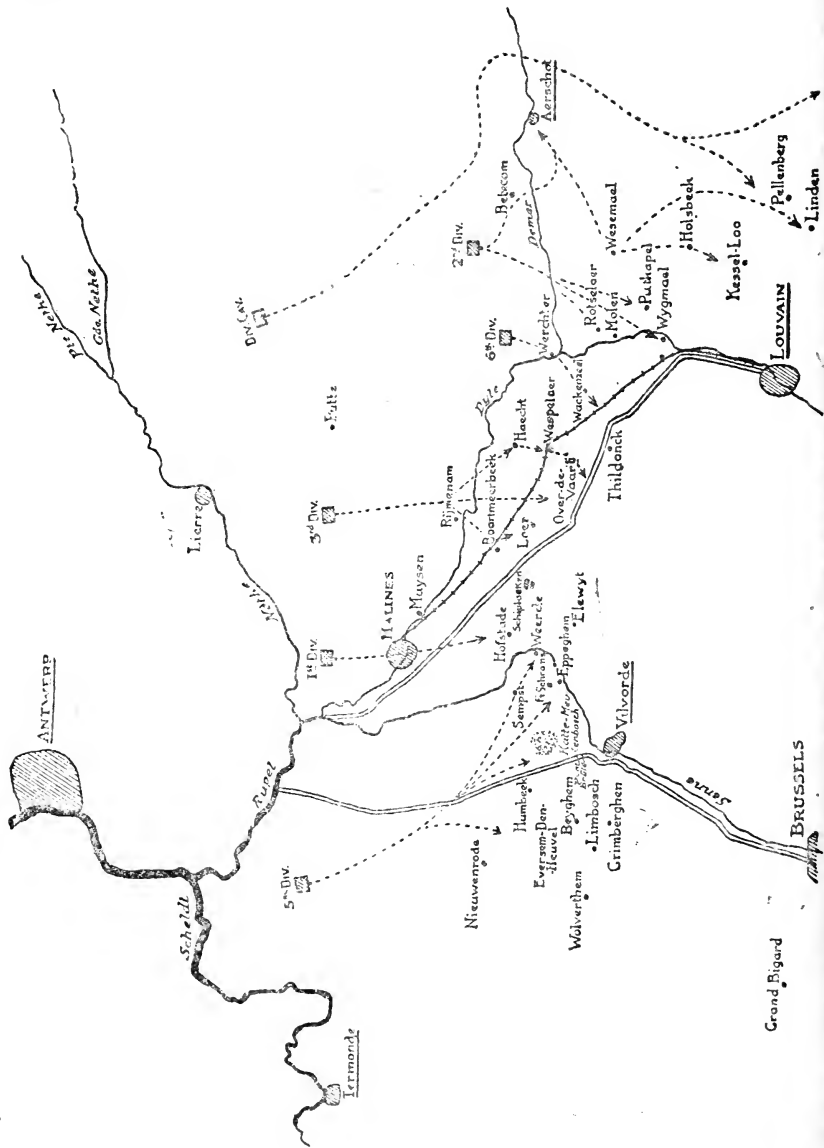
<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> See the photographs of documents in E. A. Powell. *Fighting in Flanders*, and *The Illustrated War News*, part 6, pp. 20, 30, 31, 32.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



Grand Etiquard



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE SECOND SORTIE FROM ANTWERP, KNOWN AS "THE GREAT SORTIE"

(9th-13th September)

AFTER the enemy's attack against the fourth sector of Antwerp's defences, the Belgian High Command ordered the 1st and 6th Divisions to proceed to the left bank of the Dendre, so as to protect communications in that direction. The Germans who had crossed the Scheldt after the capture of Termonde at once recrossed the river. Orders were given to the Belgians to recapture Termonde. This operation was carried out on 9th September.<sup>1</sup>

The event was marked by fresh excesses on the part of the Germans. In the course of the struggle for possession of the town some German soldiers, under command of an officer, made fifteen civilians, including five women, march before them on the St.-Gilles-lez-Termonde road.<sup>2</sup>

Before the recapture of Termonde by the Belgians, the High Command had learnt, during 7th and 8th September, that the German forces before Antwerp had been weakened. These forces had supplied reinforcements to the German armies retreating on the Marne and falling back on the Aisne. Three divisions of the German reserve had left Belgium with this object, and we have seen that the main body of the 9th Army Corps advanced by forced marches on the road from Audenarde and Renaix to Lille. The forces taken from the German army before Antwerp had been replaced by a Naval Division and the 26th and 37th Brigades of Landwehr.<sup>3</sup>

The moment was therefore favourable for assistance by the Belgian army in the operations of the Allied armies. The High Command decided to carry out, with the whole strength of the field army, a sortie which either would compel the enemy to recall to Antwerp the forces destined for France, or else, if they should not be recalled, might inflict a defeat on the now inferior forces in front of the fortress.<sup>4</sup>

The German position stretched over nearly the same front as at the time of the first sortie from Antwerp, i.e. from Haecht to Wolverthem, passing through Elewytt and Pont-Brûlé. But the Germans had strongly entrenched themselves since the sortie of 25th and 26th August. Frontal attacks seemed dangerous; an attempt must be made

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 41; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *9<sup>e</sup> Rapport de la Commission belge d'Enquête (Rapports, i. pp. 114-15)*; Evidence and Documents, f7.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 41-2; E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 42.

to turn the enemy's right, while covering Antwerp sufficiently to guard it from any counter-attack.

The sortie began on 9th September.<sup>1</sup> On this day, as we have seen, Belgian troops retook Termonde. A detachment of all arms occupied the town. Consequently the Belgian right was well protected against a surprise. Termonde was a bridgehead for the crossing of the Scheldt, and its occupation by the Belgians was enough to frustrate all enemy attacks against the fifth sector. There was nothing to be feared on this side.

The Belgian Staff's idea was to turn the right wing of the German position, and the 3rd Division of the army was despatched to the extreme point of the line at Over-de-Vaart, while the 6th Division, marching on Thildonck, and the 2nd, marching on Wygmael and Louvain, were to outflank the enemy. On the extreme left, the cavalry division, debouching on the left bank of the Dyle, was to complete the operation. Frontally, the 1st Division was to act against the German centre at Hofstade and Elewyt; on its right, the 5th Division would march against the enemy's left, in the direction of Eppenheim and Vilvorde.

The greatest secrecy was observed, and the sortie began most propitiously. On 9th September the crossings of the Dyle and Démer were secured—at Muysen and Hansbrug by the 3rd Division, at Werchter by two battalions of the 25th Regiment of the Line; and Aerschot was recaptured from the Germans. This last feat was accomplished by the 7th mixed brigade (2nd Division), under the command of General Drubbel.<sup>2</sup> By orders from Headquarters, the move on Aerschot was to be carried out by General de Witte's cavalry division, reinforced by the troops of the 7th mixed brigade, the divisional artillery under Major Pontus, and the engineer battalion of the 2nd Division of the army. West of Aerschot, on the Démer-Dyle line, the attack was to be covered by the two other brigades of the division.

On the night of 8th-9th September these troops had concentrated at Heyst-op-den-Berg. They debouched thence before dawn, and at 4.30 a.m. the head of Drubbel's column passed the cross-roads, at the boundary post 14.4 on the Lierre-Aerschot road. The plan of the attack was as follows: Colonel Lebacq, in command of the 27th Regiment of the Line, was to make a demonstration on the Lierre road with one battalion, two artillery batteries of the 7th Brigade, and two machine-gun sections. General Drubbel himself was to lead the main attack to the west and south of Aerschot, along the two banks of the Démer, having with him the 7th Regiment of the Line, a machine-gun section, Major Siron's cyclist battalion, and two horse batteries belonging to the cavalry division. This operation was to be covered by a battalion and a battery stationed at Bael. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade, under General Proost, after crossing the Démer at Testelt, would fall back on Aerschot from the east, so as to take the defenders in the rear.

There remained in reserve at Beggynendyk and Peipelheide, under

<sup>1</sup> On this sortie see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 42-3; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 75-80.

<sup>2</sup> On the recapture of Aerschot see "La 7<sup>e</sup> brigade mixte aux combats d'Aerschot et de Kessel-Loo (9 et 10 septembre 1914)," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 9th, 11th, and 14th December 1915.

the command of General de Witte, the Guides Brigade, a battalion of the 27th, Major Pontus's artillery, and the engineer battalion of the division.

As soon as the head of Drubbel's column had crossed the Lierre-Aerschot road, the cyclist battalion pushed on southwards, with the company of cyclist pioneers. The last-named quickly threw an infantry footbridge over the Démer, west of Aerschot. At 8 a.m. the cyclists and the 3rd battalion of the 7th Regiment had crossed the river without being interfered with by the enemy. The troops deployed on the south bank to protect the crossing of the main attacking force. Meanwhile the pioneers built a bridge for vehicles.

While General Drubbel's attack was thus preparing on the west, Colonel Lebacq had advanced his forces along the Lierre road to the frontal attack on Aerschot.

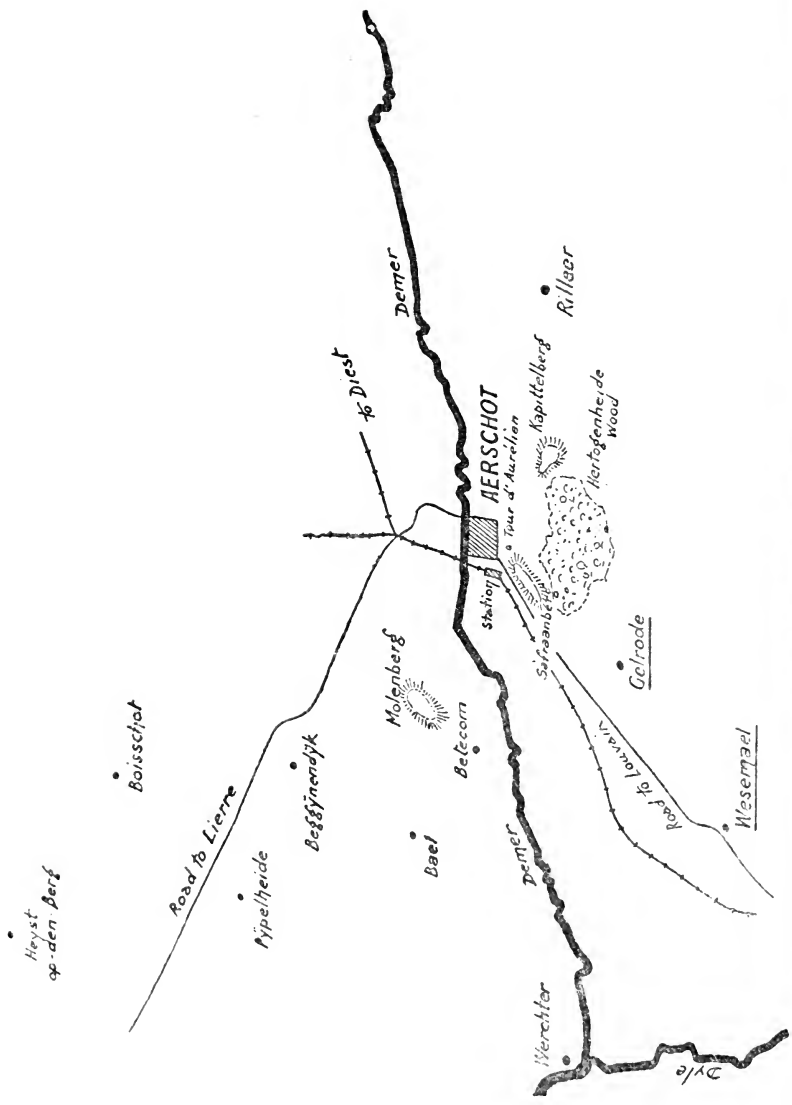
At nine o'clock the whole of the 7th Regiment had crossed the Démer. The enemy was obviously taken by surprise and offered no serious resistance. It had been agreed that the attack should begin on the signal being given by the horse batteries established on the Molenberg. General Drubbel, however, thinking to profit by the favourable circumstances of the moment, informed General de Witte that he intended to attack Aerschot without further delay. One company was left behind to guard the bridge at Betecom.

At 9.15 the cyclist battalion and the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 7th Regiment proceeded to the attack on Aerschot from the south, via the Safranberg and the slight elevations dominating the town in that quarter. From the heights of the Molenberg the horse batteries supported the movement with a violent and well-directed fire on the outskirts of the town. The din of the cannonade shook the air and filled the assailants with enthusiasm. The Belgians were burning with impatience to retake the town which had suffered so much at the enemy's hands.

At this moment scouts brought alarming news to General Drubbel. The Germans had just despatched reinforcements from the south-west. Several companies had made their appearance north of Wesemael and were hastening towards Gelrode, threatening to take the 7th Regiment of the Line in the rear precisely as its northward attack was being delivered.

No matter! For General Drubbel the objective was Aerschot; that must be taken, and from it a retreat might be made northwards if the necessity should arise. The General proceeded in person to Gelrode halt (which the Germans had burnt down some time before) and urged on briskly the advance of the attacking columns. From the Molenberg the Belgian batteries unceasingly poured their shells on the outskirts of the town. The clouds of dust and smoke which were seen rising up showed the efficacy of their fire.

In the meantime, north of Aerschot, Colonel Lebacq's attack had made progress along the Lierre road. To hasten its success, General de Witte had sent the 1st battalion of the 27th, which he had up to now kept with him in reserve. The line of skirmishers reached the northern edge of the town almost without a struggle. There the first German shots greeted them; but the Belgians, pushing forward vigorously, soon reached the bridges over the Démer. The Germans



THE BETAKING OF AERSCHOT.

resisted for a moment and then suddenly gave way. In panic they fled through the streets toward the southern exit. This panic had seized the garrison of Aerschot on seeing on the heights of the Safraanberg the first units of the 7th Regiment preparing to fall on the rear of the defence.

Abandoning the bridges entrusted to their charge, the German soldiers had wheeled half round. It was a strange sight which now offered itself to the Belgian eyes watching the town from the heights of the Safraanberg and the neighbouring hills—a swarming mass of grey uniforms, coming from every direction, from the station, the goods dépôt, and the neighbouring houses. All were running towards the centre of the town, apparently throwing away arms and kit. But they took care not to leave the fruits of their pillaging, for they were seen dragging everywhere bales full of things stolen during the sack and occupation of the town.

This sight stirred the soldiers of the 7th Regiment to fierce and righteous anger. The memory of the events of 19th August and the following days multiplied their energy tenfold, and they sprang forward with rage, in such disorder as threatened to compromise seriously the success of their operations. Officers rushed up, shouting vigorous commands, halted the men, and succeeded in making them understand that the hostile garrison must be taken prisoners as they came out of the town.

Meanwhile Major Evrard, commanding the 3rd battalion of the 7th Regiment, hastened the attack. He had been ordered to march on the ancient Aurelian tower, the old building standing out on the summit of the last ridge dominating the town from the south. The enemy must be entrenched there. And, in fact, as soon as the first ranks of the battalion descended along the slopes of the Safraanberg, they were received with a violent fusillade. Many fell, one entire section being mown down. The second-in-command to Major Evrard fell, mortally wounded, at the side of his chief.

The Belgians hesitated for an instant, and their line wavered. The commander of the 2nd company, which led the attack, fell dead. Seeing the danger threatening the whole operation, Captain Deguent sped forward, revolver in hand, and led the men on, running like an athlete, to the summit crowned by the old tower. They reached it, and a few soldiers searched the tower as the bullets whistled and spattered about them. The Germans still held one last line keeping the Belgians out of Aerschot on the south. From here they fired furiously, using their machine guns almost at point-blank range.

The men of the 7th were winded in consequence of their recent climbs and descents in this hilly neighbourhood. Still, vigorous progress was necessary if the enemy was to be caught in his lair. Suddenly a bugle-call rent the air. It was Captain Deguent sounding the assault. A second bugle gave out the first bars of the regimental march. As if galvanized, the company threw itself forward, overcame the last obstacle in its way, and plunged into the nearest houses of Aerschot. Other companies were following behind. Soon the soldiers of the 7th had joined their comrades of the 27th, who had just got through the town from the north. Aerschot was recaptured!

Cheering rang forth. It was a moment of exuberant joy and

enthusiasm. A few inhabitants who had been driven into their cellars by the tumult of the fighting appeared on the thresholds of their homes. The sight of Belgian uniforms filled them at once with astonishment and with joy. Weeping with happiness, old women threw themselves on their knees, believing that the end of their tortures had come.

It was now 11.30 a.m. General Drubbel's mission, however, was not finished with the capture of Aerschot. No doubt a good number of prisoners had already been picked up in small parties; but a portion of the garrison had succeeded in escaping, some southwards towards the Kapittelberg, others eastward toward Rillaer.

In accordance with the general arrangements, Proost's cavalry brigade would soon appear in the latter quarter and cut off the fugitives' retreat. So General Drubbel decided to turn his attention to the heights of the Kapittelberg and the neighbouring woods. The approaches to the town must be cleared, and that quickly, or else the enemy might call reinforcements to his aid.

The Germans, who were comparatively numerous, seemed disposed to offer a vigorous resistance, and the very nature of the ground was in their favour. The horse batteries were ordered to take up new positions rapidly, to establish themselves on the Safraanberg, and to open fire on the wooded heights where the enemy was. The infantry was to undertake the assault on the Kapittelberg, the two battalions of the 27th and the 3rd battalion of the 7th debouching from Aerschot, while the 2nd battalion of the 7th covered the right of the attacking troops, menacing the German left flank the while through the Hertogenheide woods.

The task was a hard one. The 2nd battalion of the 7th, under Major Mertens, had to advance through dense thickets, from which came continually shots fired by invisible foemen. Its progress therefore was slow, and was only achieved at the cost of heavy losses. As for the battalions making the frontal attack on the Kapittelberg, their rush was stopped by a terrible fusillade. The Belgians could only advance by irregular dashes along the wooded slopes, and every move forward had to be prepared by a very full rifle and machine-gun fire sweeping the heights to be gained.

Soon, however, the Belgian batteries on the Safraanberg were sending their first projectiles on to the heights where the enemy was entrenched. The infantry rushed on; but so violent a fire received them from the crests of the Kapittelberg that it appeared doubtful whether the space separating them from their coveted goal could ever be crossed by the attackers. Lying full length among the thickets and trees, the men hesitated. In vain their officers pressed them on and addressed energetic appeals to them. They seemed riveted to the ground.

Suddenly the bugles gave out the strident notes of the assault, and Second-Lieutenant Deguent, unfurling the colours of the 27th, dashed bravely forward. With a bound the whole line was up. Hurrahs burst forth, mingled with cries of "*Vive la Belgique!*" Carried away by enthusiasm, the soldiers hurled themselves forward and burst like a storm on the enemy's position. The Germans scattered in complete rout. Two hundred of them, seeing all resistance was

useless, threw up their arms, shouting hoarsely, "*Nicht kapout! Kamarad! Nicht kapout!*"

At the same instant, the battalion under Mertens had succeeded in sweeping the Hertogenheide woods and putting to flight the last groups of the enemy holding the thickets. Lastly, General Proost's brigade of lancers had just appeared in the Rillaer neighbourhood and was capturing the fugitives who had fled thither. Three hundred and fifty Germans fell into the hands of the Belgians. A few days afterwards Antwerp was to see them marching through her streets on their way to the port to be embarked for England.<sup>1</sup> More than five hundred rifles, a quantity of munitions, and a train-load of flour were captured.

The following episode, while testifying to the magnificent bravery of some of the 7th Brigade, says much for the demoralization of the enemy. The town had just been taken when Captain Courboin, of the horse artillery, learnt from some soldiers of the 27th Regiment that there was a wounded man of the 2nd Guides in the wood between Aerschot and Nieuwrode. He asked for six soldiers and a corporal to accompany him so far; and the 2nd Guides' chaplain went with them. The little band made for the wood, put to flight a few Germans on the edge of it, and penetrated over half a mile under the cover of the trees. They found the wounded horseman lying on the road, but he had just died. Having nothing more to do, the band made its way back. As they emerged from the wood, they came upon a motor machine gun car just starting on a reconnaissance towards Nieuwrode. Taking advantage of the meeting, the soldiers of the 27th begged their officer to allow them to avenge their comrade's death. Courboin granted their request, and ordered the driver of the car to go on in front, while he and the six soldiers set to work to search beyond the wood into all the houses bordering the road. During this search the motor machine gun swept the crest of the neighbouring heights.

On arriving at the outskirts of Nieuwrode, the captain found on the crest twenty dead and wounded enemy. At this very moment there came out from behind a house, about five yards away, a German horseman. Courboin shot him and was preparing to search the house, when out of a window came a rifle with a white flag on it. At once the Belgian officer shouted in German: "Throw your arms out of window." Instantly a quantity of rifles were thrown out on the road. Then the captain ordered the enemy to come out one by one, which they did. To the great stupefaction of the Belgians, there were 112 of them: 106 privates, five non-commissioned officers, and a lieutenant of regulars. Ordering the motor machine gun to cover the return journey, Courboin made their own lieutenant take command of the German prisoners, sent on in advance for doctors to attend to two German non-commissioned officers and three privates who had been wounded, and brought the captives back to Aerschot under the little escort of eight. For this achievement the soldiers were mentioned in the Orders of the Day, and Courboin was recommended for the Order of Leopold.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See a remarkable photograph of this convoy of prisoners in *The Illustrated War News*, London, part 6, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> "Un mort vengé," by P. A. F., in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 25th December 1914. See also Captain Courboin's account in C. Buffin's book, *Récits de combattants*.

General Drubbel proceeded to the organization of the conquered ground and its occupation in such a way as to guard Aerschot from any fresh surprise. The spectacle offered to the Belgians as they went about the streets of the town was pitiable.<sup>1</sup>

On the road from Lierre, near the bridge over the channel running off from the Démer, all the houses of the small cultivators and market gardeners were in ruins. Outbuildings, stables, sheepfolds, blacksmiths' shops, fowl-houses, all had been burnt down level with the soil. The fields under crops, gardens, hedges, and fruit trees had been destroyed for a radius of twenty to thirty yards round the buildings. The winding way which leads from the Lierre road to the Market Square had been burnt through its entire length—about 500 yards—and the fire had spread to the alleys running off to the right and left. At the time when the Belgian columns marched through this quarter, the walls and the gables were collapsing under the action of the wind which was blowing that day, and crumbling away in clouds of dust. On the Grand' Place the burgomaster's house bore traces of the fusillade which started the sack on 19th August.<sup>2</sup> The *Gildenhuis* and three houses had been destroyed by fire. The church was a lamentable sight. Its three doors, as well as those of the sacristy, showed traces of fire. Two of them seemed to have been smashed in by blows from a battering-ram. The altars, confessional-boxes, harmoniums, and candlesticks had been broken, the alms-boxes burst open, the Gothic wooden statues torn from their pedestals. The greatest disorder reigned everywhere. The ground was still littered with the hay on which, for many days, the imprisoned townspeople had lain.

Along the highway to Louvain, from point to point, could be seen the calcined remains of two, three, or sometimes five neighbouring houses in a group. Towards Gelrode the ruins were crumbling away of peasants' cottages and bourgeois villas, situated at the foot of the hills. At the southern exit from Aerschot, about a hundred yards to the left of the road, was the execution ground, where the burgomaster, his brother, his son, and a group of inhabitants, had been shot on 20th August. At the base of an embankment clots of blackened blood still marked the place occupied by the victims facing the firing-platoon. The traces were every two yards apart, confirming the statements of witnesses that the executioners made two out of every three men come out of the ranks, the lot deciding who was to die.

A few paces away from here the Belgian soldiers might see a humble wooden cross, secretly put up by loving hands to mark the trench where the victims' bodies lay.<sup>3</sup>

The town had been entirely sacked. In most of the houses the furniture had been overturned, scattered, ripped up, soiled in a disgusting manner; the wall-papers hung in strips, the cellar-doors had been burst open, the cupboards, drawers, and every corner penetrated

<sup>1</sup> We give the following details after the report of M. Orts, councillor of legation, who accompanied the Belgian troops to Aerschot. See the text of this report in *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 59 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See the photograph taken by M. Orts, reproduced in H. Davignon's *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> See the photograph in the book just quoted, same page.



and emptied. An incredible number of empty bottles lay about. Everything showed that many places had been the scenes of drunkenness and disgraceful debauches.

On searching the prisoners whom they had just taken and examining the diaries in their possession, the Belgians found valuable evidence as to the tortures to which the inhabitants of the unhappy town had been subjected. In one of these diaries we read: "We have shut up 450 men in Aerschot church; I was near the church at the time." Another soldier made the note: "September 6th . . . we have sent 300 Belgians to Germany, including 22 parish-priests."<sup>1</sup>

The orderer of the massacres of 19th and 20th August also fell into Belgian hands. Brought to judgment before a court-martial, he loudly pleaded previous instructions; and the Military Governor of Belgium under occupation, being called upon by him to exculpate him, was ready to protect him by a formal declaration to that effect.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile a peaceful calm had followed this day of battle. Proceeding to cantonments between Aerschot and Gelrode, the troops of the 7th mixed brigade passed the night of 9th-10th September in untroubled rest.

While these events were taking place on the left wing of the Belgian army, the right wing, consisting of the 5th Division, had the task of operating east of the Willebroeck Canal, against the German positions constructed along the line Pont-Brûlé-Eppeghem-Weerde, of sanguinary memory.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of some units of the 1st Brigade, which marched through the burnt ruins of Cappelle-au-Bois on Nieuwenrode, the rest of the division inclined towards the west and crossed to the right bank of the Willebroeck canal. From there the attack was directed due south, the 15th Brigade operating in the region along the canal, the 17th making for Eppeghem. On the morning of 10th September contact was established with the enemy at the very moment when the 1st Division of the army in its turn arrived before Hofstade. From the start the duel was fierce on the whole front Hofstade-Sempst-Bosch-Nieuwenrode. On their guard since the initial reverse which they had suffered on this front during the earlier Belgian sortie, the Germans were strongly organized here. As soon as the Belgian troops were signalled, the heavy German guns began to thunder. In spite of this bombardment and the rain which had begun to fall, the Belgians kept up a valiant fight, and in the evening the advanced posts of the enemy had everywhere been driven back.

At the other end of the line the offensive was continued during the day, the 10th. Aerschot having been taken the previous day, and the 5th Brigade for its part having seized the crossing of the Démer at Werchter, the 2nd Division, under the command of Lieutenant-General Dossin, was entrusted on the morning of the 10th with the task of marching on Louvain and driving out the enemy.<sup>4</sup>

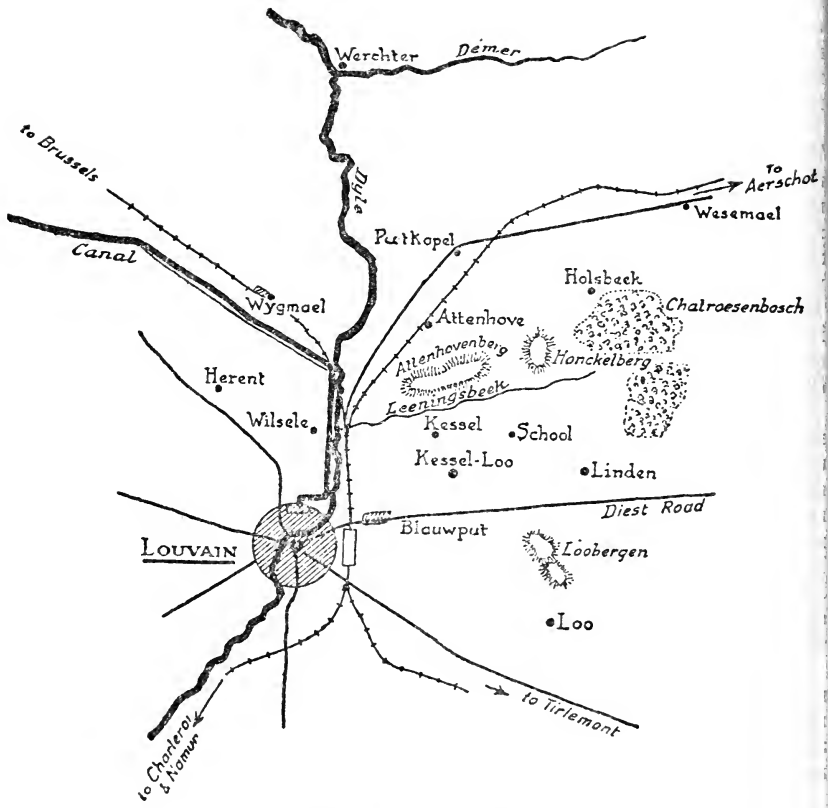
Before they could execute this movement, the troops of the

<sup>1</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 67; ii. p. 177 (photographs).

<sup>2</sup> H. Davignon, *Les procédés de guerre des Allemands en Belgique*, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> See "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, already quoted.

<sup>4</sup> On the move against Louvain see "La 7<sup>e</sup> brigade mixte aux combats d'Aerschot et Kessel-Loo," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 16th, 18th, and 21st December 1915.



THE ATTACK ON LOUVAIN.

2nd Division had to force the passage of the canal at Wygmael. This duty was assigned to the 6th mixed brigade, composed of the 6th and 26th Regiments of the Line. These regiments acquitted themselves nobly. The enemy detachments which occupied Putkapel were vigorously pushed back, and the 26th soon started work against the defenders of Wygmael itself, making progress in spite of a desperate resistance. About noon General Dossin was informed that at this point the Belgians were masters of the situation. About 12.30 the 5th Brigade, which on the previous day had seized and organized the bridgehead at Werchter, was relieved by portions of the 6th Army Division. The 5th and 25th Regiments of the Line being thus set free, General Dossin had all his forces at his disposal. He gave orders at once for the attack on Louvain to proceed.

The 6th Brigade—except the 26th of the Line, which occupied Wygmael—was to march on the town via Kessel and Blauwput; the 7th Brigade, assembled at this moment on the Aerschot road, was to attack in the direction of Holsbeek and School, so as to approach Louvain in the neighbourhood of the railway station; and the 5th Brigade was to move from Werchter to Putkapel and act as divisional reserve.

Pontus's artillery was placed at the disposal of the 7th Brigade. The cavalry division was to cover the left wing of the attack, to follow its progress, and to establish itself on the Pellenberg plateau, east of Louvain.

At 1 p.m. the 7th Brigade made a move to the south, leaving the environs of Wesemael in two columns. The right column, comprising two battalions of the 27th of the Line, the 33rd mounted battery, and the machine gun company of the 7th Brigade, marched on School by way of Holsbeek and the bridge over the Leeningsbeek; the left column, consisting of the 7th of the Line, the rest of Pontus's artillery, and Thonard's group (artillery of the 7th Brigade), marched on Linden along the eastern fringe of the Chatroesenbosch. When they should reach School and Linden respectively, the two columns were to await fresh instructions.

A platoon of gendarmerie preceded the columns as scouts. They soon signalled that Holsbeek was clear of the enemy. Without loss of time the 27th took immediate possession. But as they emerged from the village bullets whistled about them. The Germans had discovered the Belgian movements.

General Drubbel made for the heights south-west of Holsbeek and there noticed a feverish activity on the enemy's part. In the direction of Attenhoven he saw here and there small German columns appearing and disappearing among the spinneys, thickets, and hillocks in which the neighbourhood abounds. Preparations were being made on the Attenhovenberg for planting a battery. A spitting of rifle fire came from the lower ground. The Germans were not going to let themselves be surprised as on the previous day.

With the object of parrying an attack from the region which he had just been examining through his glasses, General Drubbel threw out upon the slope of the Honckelberg a flank-guard of two companies of the 27th and installed upon the northern slope of the same elevation the 33rd mounted battery. Under the protection of these forces, the

Belgian right column advanced rapidly on School across the valley of the Leeningsbeek, enfiladed by a heavy fire from German rifles. Soon the 33rd battery and the flank-guard, supported by machine guns, had to deal with the Germans, and put up a stolid resistance, despite serious losses, in order to let the attacking column marching on School carry out the prescribed movement.

At 4 p.m. the skirmishers of the 27th were in touch with the enemy's infantry defending the outskirts of Kessel, and one company proceeded to the attack on School, which was also occupied by the Germans.

At the same time the 33rd battery on the Honckelberg received the enemy's special attention. A hail of projectiles was soon beating about it. But the Belgians continued to serve their guns stoically and replied as best they could. Meanwhile the right column was encountering an increasingly obstinate resistance at Kessel and in the direction of School, where the 27th had a very hard task.

During this, what had become of the left column, marching on Linden along the Chatroesenbosch? Enquiries made of villagers elicited the information that some detachments of the enemy were still haunting the wooded region separating the two Belgian columns. It was necessary at all costs to establish communication. Lieutenant Delvaux carried out the dangerous mission. He crossed at full speed the interval between the columns, reached Linden, and luckily fell in with the 7th Regiment of the Line, which had just executed the movement entrusted to it by General Drubbel.

Immediately the order came for the two columns of the brigade to combine their attack. The operations of the 27th at Kessel were still to be supported by the battery on the Honckelberg. The 7th was to make for Loo, supported by Pontus's and Thonard's batteries, which were taking up position on a height north-east of Linden, called the Steenenveld. From this point the fire of the batteries was also to support the 27th's movements at Kessel. The combined attack was therefore directed south-west cutting across the road from Diest, threatening the road from Tirlemont, and approaching Louvain on its eastern side.

Meanwhile the 27th was making fruitless efforts in front of Kessel, where the Germans fiercely resisted all assaults. At School the Belgians succeeded in carrying the hamlet, but tried in vain to emerge from it west and south. The ground separating them from the enemy was swept by a hellish fire, and any one attempting to cross it was struck down at once. So machine guns were called for and installed in the houses on the outskirts of the hamlet. Soon their murderous "tac-tac-tac," regular and merciless, began to sound. Their action was effective. Gradually the enemy's fire died down. The infernal music of the machine guns restored the spirits of the men in Posch's battalion, and the major took the opportunity to sound the charge. As though by clockwork, the whole line rose up. The colours of the 27th flapped in the wind. The order went forth: "Forward! Long live the King!"

The bayonets were levelled, and the men sprang forward. Nothing could now stop them. The enemy's firing became ragged. He does not like cold steel. One last effort by the Belgians, and he would give way. The effort was made. . . . A final dash carried the Belgians into the enemy's positions. The Germans turned tail and raced along

the road in the direction of Louvain. Posch's battalion was now on the way leading to the abbey of Vlierbeek.

Darkness was beginning to fall—it was 6.30. It was necessary to reconnoitre, to give the men a breathing-space, and to restore order among the companies, which had got mixed in the charge.

At this moment, through the dusk which was beginning to envelop everything, there was descried on the right a body of men running down the hills from Kessel. Doubtless it was the other battalion of the 27th, which had succeeded in overcoming the resistance at Kessel. And, indeed, it announced itself with shouts of "27th of the Line!" A joyful response was made.

Then suddenly a cry of alarm went up, heard through the volley which burst forth: "They are *Boches!*" Some Belgians had already fallen, treacherously shot. A recoil was noticeable among the victims of the enemy's ruse. But officers sprang forward and restored order in the ranks. Already the Belgians were replying to the German fire. The attackers began to melt away, cries and curses mingling with groans. Soon, after heavy losses, the enemy retired. Those who were left disappeared in disorder among the thickets. The Germans had fallen into their own trap, and Kessel was completely in Belgian hands.

While these events were happening, the sound of sustained firing came from the wooded hills of Loobergen. The 7th Regiment of the Line, on its way from Linden, had crossed the Louvain-Diest road and got into touch with the enemy around the hills south of this road. There, too, the German resistance was vigorous. The Belgian artillery, extending its range, violently bombarded the ground up to the hamlet of Loo. Gathering all his available troops, General Drubbel hurled them without delay against the German flank. Two consecutive charges of the 7th were stopped by a pitiless fire; from the dense thickets the flashes of the German rifles never ceased to leap. It was almost night. To continue the struggle in this maze of thickets was dangerous and impossible. First there must be a preparatory bombardment to sweep the lairs where the enemy was hiding in force. The attack was suspended until next day. Gradually the firing died down. . . . The 7th Brigade bivouacked in the positions it had won.

During this day, 10th September, fighting took place not only on the front of the Belgian right wing, from Hofstade to Nieuwenrode, and on the left wing, near Louvain, but also on the rest of the front. In the afternoon there was a very sharp engagement in the centre, the Germans attacking vigorously the bridgehead at Hansbrug, which the troops of the 3rd Division had captured and organized on the 9th. The enemy bombarded this position with numerous batteries, and attempted to outflank it on the west. This attack, however, was beaten back by the men of the 9th and 14th of the Line, the glorious survivors of Liège.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, to the extreme left, on the plateaus of the Pellenberg, the cavalry division had gone through many fights to protect the outer flank of the Belgians against the attacks of German reinforcements hurried up from the nearest garrisons.

Before Louvain the battle had ended. The great silence of the

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 78.

night had followed the din of the struggle. From time to time a shot rent the air, the groan of a wounded man or the death-rattle of a dying one rose up in the darkness. Westward there mounted, twisted and contorted by the wind, flames which covered the horizon north and east of Louvain. As they retreated, the Germans had set fire to the farms and ricks. From their bivouacs the Belgians could see, outlined against the red background of the blaze, the black silhouettes of Germans taking the incendiary torch from house to house.<sup>1</sup>

On 11th September, at 3.30 a.m., the units of the 7th Brigade were already reassembled. Pontus's artillery, whose duty it was, at the first gleams of dawn, to let loose its volleys upon the thickets of Loobergen and to prepare the way for the attack on Louvain itself, proceeded to the heights of School, where the batteries were to be planted. The signal for the assault was soon to be given to the infantry. . . .

Suddenly an express reached General Drubbel, bringing the order for a rapid retreat north. What had happened? The other units of the 2nd Division, which were operating to the right of the 7th Brigade, in the direction of Wygmael and Putkapel, had all at once met with a furious resistance from the enemy and had had their progress checked. Consequently General Drubbel's troops found themselves isolated, in a wooded and dangerous country, and ran the risk of being enveloped and annihilated.

Therefore the 7th Brigade received orders not to let itself be caught, but to beat a retreat as speedily as possible. One may imagine the stupor and despair which fell upon the staff of the brigade receiving these orders. The dearly coveted treasure was disappearing from view at the very moment when they thought to grasp it! A squadron of the 4th Mounted Chasseurs, pushing rapidly forward with remarkable audacity, had already penetrated into Louvain itself;<sup>2</sup> another pioneer detachment had made its way nearly to Cumptich and had cut the railway between Louvain and Tirlemont.<sup>3</sup>

But orders must be obeyed. In the evening of the 10th and during the night the Germans had called to their aid reinforcements taken from garrisons in the interior, and also the 6th Reserve Division, which was on the march towards France.<sup>4</sup> It was imperative not to allow these new forces to annihilate them.

In the meantime the remainder of the Belgian army, while the Germans held their positions in front of the left wing, had pushed forward. The 6th Division, starting from Werchter, marched through Wackerzeel on Thildonek. The vanguard, consisting of the carabinieri, reached the Malines-Louvain railway.

The 3rd Division, starting from Muysen and Rymenam, occupied Haecht and Boortmeerbeek. Wespelaer was captured by the 11th Regiment of the Line; Haecht station was carried by the 9th and 14th of the Line; the 12th of the Line and the 4th Chasseurs reached the hamlet of Laer. When night fell the 11th occupied the north bank of the canal, east of Over-de-Vaart.

<sup>1</sup> "La 7<sup>e</sup> brigade mixte," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 21st December 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 78; *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78; *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 43.

In the centre the attack was equally fortunate. The 1st Division took Hofstade by assault, established itself in the Schiplaeken woods, and occupied Sempst. On its right the troops of the 5th Division were attacking Eppeghem, Weerde, and the neighbourhood east of the Willebroeck canal.<sup>1</sup>

In the last-mentioned quarter the troops of the 16th Brigade found themselves opposed to a very strong defence.<sup>2</sup> In front of them stretched the Katte-Meuter-Bosch, with the canal on one side, and on the other groups of houses situated along the roads leading from Eppeghem. A fierce and murderous struggle was destined to be continued here for two whole days. It was necessary, to get possession of the position, to cover the offensive of the troops operating in the direction of Eppeghem and Weerde. The artillery of the brigade bombarded the edge of the wood. The chasseurs dashed forward to the attack across an almost open stretch of ground, rained upon by rifles and machine guns. Well supported by the artillery, they pressed on without a pause. A man from Liège, making a pun which caused shouts of laughter in spite of the horrors of the fight, cried out: "We'll have this filthy wood of the *quatre menteurs boches!*" (four lying Boches—or Katte-Meuter-Bosch). And indeed it was captured, but at the price of cruel losses. Dead without number heaped the ground over which the attack had passed. The corpses could not be picked up before nightfall.

The 17th Brigade, for its part, had succeeded in carrying the Schrans farm and the enemy's defences in front of Eppeghem, but it did not succeed in taking the village itself. Lastly, on the extreme right, beyond the Willebroeck canal, the 1st Regiment of the Line pushed forward until its front ran Humbeek-Den Heuvel-Eversem.<sup>3</sup>

This general attack was to have been proceeded with on 12th September. But at dawn it could be seen that the enemy had brought into line important reinforcements. The 6th Reserve Division had retraced its steps by forced marches and enabled the Germans to counter-attack. Abundance of heavy artillery supported them.<sup>4</sup> The day was marked by combats of exceptional violence. The efforts of the German reinforcements were principally directed towards Wespelaer, where the turning movement of the Belgian left wing had caused anxiety on the previous day. The enemy's counter-attacks were launched in the direction of Betecom, Werchter, and Haecht.<sup>5</sup>

On the extreme left, General Drubbel's brigade had fallen back from position to position, and had safely arrived at Aerschot. De Witte's cavalry division, in the early hours of 11th September, had abandoned the Pellenberg, leading their horses by the bridles, with the wheels of their caissons and carts muffled in straw, and marching in impressive silence for a long hour and a half. When at dawn the Germans threw themselves on the bivouac of the division, they found not a man nor a horse there. All danger had been averted in this quarter.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>2</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes," etc., already quoted.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes," etc.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 79; *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> "La 7<sup>e</sup> brigade mixte," etc.

During the day of 12th September the enemy attacked the other troops of the 2nd Division, which had been held up at Wygmael and Putkapel, driving them back on Rotselaer and Wesemael. The 6th Brigade had soon to evacuate its positions, which had become untenable under the constant hail of shells. Just when the infantry began to fall back hastily, carrying away with them in their retreat the supporting artillery, a major took up his stand right in the middle of the plain and, under a deadly fire, waved his *képi* above his head, trying to gather his grenadiers to him. For half an hour he kept on at this, continually crying this loud, monotonous cry: "Grenadiers! To me! Grenadiers! To me! Grenadiers!" He collected twenty-five to thirty at the utmost. A few detached themselves from a retreating company, but they were stopped by the shells. In the midst of his little group of men lying flat on the ground, the major, standing upright and alone in the plain, continued to wave his *képi* and make his appeal.<sup>1</sup>

As for the troops of the 5th Brigade, they suffered heavy losses at Molen. The 2nd Division had no alternative but to fall back on the Démer.<sup>2</sup>

The 6th Division was attacked, in its turn, between Thildonck and Wackerzeel. It held out against the Germans for five hours; but when the retirement of the 2nd Division had bared its left flank, it too was compelled to beat a retreat to the Démer. This movement, again, exposed the flank of the 3rd Division. At the beginning of the day, the latter had gained ground towards Over-de-Vaart. It was savagely attacked in front and on the left, and found itself hard pressed from noon onward. Laer and Wespelaer had to be abandoned.<sup>3</sup> At Haecht the struggle was terrible. The 14th Regiment of the Line lost there more than a third of its remaining effectives.<sup>4</sup> As for the 12th of the Line, forming the rear-guard of the division, it fought with despair, and only retired on receiving superior orders.<sup>5</sup> The obstinate resistance of the division continued until night, when it retired slowly on Rymenam and Hansbrug under a terrific cannonade.

In front of the positions of the 1st Division the Germans, protected by the Willebroeck canal and the Senne, offered a fierce resistance to all attacks. The Belgians dislodged the enemy from the château of Linterpoort, behind Sempst, from the hamlet of Dries, and from the houses in Weerdenhoek. But the first assault on the village of Weerde itself failed.<sup>6</sup>

Here is the very vivid description by an American war correspondent of this first assault:—

It was known that the Germans occupied Weerde in force, so throughout the day the Belgian artillery, masked by heavy woods, pounded away incessantly. By noon the enemy's guns ceased to reply, which was assumed by the jubilant Belgians to be a sign that the German artillery had been silenced. At noon the Belgian 1st Division moved forward. . . .

<sup>1</sup> F. H. Grimanty, *Six mois de guerre en Belgique par un soldat belge*, Paris, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> "Nos régiments, Le 14<sup>e</sup> de Ligne," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 12th December 1914.

<sup>5</sup> "L'entrée du Prince Léopold dans l'armée. Le discours du Roi," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 10th April 1915.

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 79-80.



Late in the afternoon word was passed down the line that the German guns had been put out of action, that the enemy was retiring, and that at 5.30 sharp the whole Belgian line would advance and take the town with the bayonet. Under cover of artillery fire, so continuous that it sounded like the thunder in the mountains, the Belgian infantry climbed out of the trenches and, throwing aside their knapsacks, formed up behind the road preparatory to the grand assault. A moment later a dozen dog-batteries came trotting up and took position on the left of the infantry. At 5.30 to the minute the whistles of the officers sounded shrilly and the mile-long line of men swept forward cheering. They crossed the roadway, they scrambled over ditches, they climbed fences, they pushed through hedges, until they were within a hundred yards of the line of buildings which formed the outskirts of the town. Then, Hell itself broke loose. The whole German front, which for several hours past had replied but feebly to the Belgian fire, spat a continuous stream of lead and flame. The rolling crash of musketry and the ripping snarl of machine guns were stabbed by the vicious *pom-pom-pom-pom-pom* of the quick-firers. From every window of the three-storied chateau opposite us the lean muzzles of mitrailleuses poured out their hail of death. I have seen fighting on four continents, but I have never witnessed so deadly a fire as that which wiped out the head of the Belgian column. The Germans had prepared a trap and the Belgians had walked—or rather charged—directly into it. Three minutes later the dog-batteries came tearing back on a dead run. . . . Back through the hedges, across the ditches, over the roadway came the Belgian infantry, crouching, stooping, running for their lives. Every now and then a soldier would stumble, as though he had stubbed his toe, and throw out his arms, and fall headlong. A bullet had hit him. The road was sprinkled with silent forms in blue and green. The fields were sprinkled with them too. One man was hit as he was struggling to get through a hedge and died standing, held upright by the thorny branches. Men with blood streaming down their faces, men with horrid crimson patches on their tunics, limped, crawled, staggered past, leaving scarlet trails behind them. A young officer of chasseurs, who had been recklessly exposing himself while trying to check the retreat of his men, suddenly spun round on his heels, like one of those wooden toys which the curb-venders sell, and then crumpled up, as though all the bone and muscle had gone out of him. A man plunged into a half-filled ditch and lay there, with his head under water. I could see the water slowly redden.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, a fresh assault was ordered. The Belgians gained a footing in Weerde and conquered the place entirely by nightfall.<sup>2</sup>

Still further on, between Eppeghem and the Willebroeck canal, the 16th Brigade fought furiously to keep the Katte-Meuter-Bosch. The Germans made efforts to retake the wood and so threaten the flank of the troops attacking Eppeghem. But the Mons Chasseurs, who had orders to hold it, stuck to their positions with the finest courage. Scattered along the southern edge of the wood and over the neighbouring ground, nearly as far as Eppeghem, they resisted obstinately, regardless of the terrible losses inflicted on them by the enemy's batteries. Moreover, the Belgian artillery and machine guns which supported them tore terrible holes in the German ranks. Lieutenant Clooten, in command of the machine guns, never ceased to stir up his men's courage, going from one group to another and punctuating with "Bravos!" the magnificent firing of his guns. Suddenly he collapsed, killed stone-dead by a bullet in his forehead.

At Katte-Meuter-Bosch the position was becoming critical. Major Delbaue's battalion there was overwhelmed by a sustained fire at short range and by the shooting of a battery which had just been planted barely 800 yards from the wood. To rescue these heroes, the second gun of the Belgian 84th battery was brought forward at full speed and succeeded in getting into position under the enemy's fire, when it

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 155-161.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 80.

started to work furiously. Thanks to this support, Delbauve's battalion managed to hold its trenches.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, on the extreme left, across the canal, the 1st Regiment of the Line gained possession of Limbosch, Beyghem, and the woods south of Humbeek. When they tried to emerge from this cover, they were checked by a battery of high calibre posted about Grimbergen.<sup>2</sup>

The battle was now reaching its end. The various divisions had been obliged gradually to fall back, beginning with the 2nd on the left wing, the 6th and 3rd in the centre. The retreat of the 5th and 1st Divisions, in their turn, became necessary. Consequently, on 13th September the whole army broke off the fight and retired on Antwerp.

The object of the Great Sortie had been accomplished. The operation had compelled the Germans to recall the 6th Division of the 3rd Reserve Corps definitively to the Belgian front. Furthermore, the 9th Reserve Corps, under Von Boehn, wandered about for two days, not knowing which way to go, and suspended its rapid march on France at the precise moment when the German armies were in pressing need of reinforcements during the retreat on the Marne.<sup>3</sup>

As Mr. Powell well says—

Owing to strategic reasons the magnitude and significance of the great four days' battle which was fought in mid-September between the Belgian field army and the combined German forces in Northern Belgium was carefully masked in all official communications at the time, and in the rush of later events its importance was lost sight of. Yet the great flanking movement of the Allies in France largely owed its success to this determined offensive movement on the part of the Belgians.<sup>4</sup>

The enemy had been made to feel seriously anxious, and the German soldiers could not refrain from giving expression to their admiration of the qualities of the Belgian soldier. A soldier of the 48th Infantry Reserve Regiment, taken prisoner at Elewyt, scribbled the following remarks in his diary, under the date 11th September :—

Whoever pretends that the Belgian soldier is a coward has never learnt to know him. The Belgians know very well that they can do nothing against us, and that they can expect no reinforcements. They defend themselves, nevertheless, with such spirit that we only succeed very rarely in dislodging them from what they hold, and then at the cost of the greatest sacrifices. We thought, at the beginning, to make but one mouthful of them, but we must yield to the evidence; we have not yet finished with them and the thing may go on for a long time yet.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequent events fully proved that this German soldier gauged his enemy correctly.

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs a pied."

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 43; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> *Cf. Courrier de l'Armée*, 14th November 1914.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### SECOND BOMBARDMENT OF TERMONDE—THREE ATTACKS ON ENEMY'S LINES OF COMMUNICATION—THIRD SORTIE FROM ANTWERP

THE Great Sortie had convinced the Germans of the need for definitive operations against Antwerp, if they were not to be continually harassed by the attacks of the Belgian field army. They therefore undertook the initial measures for laying siege to that stronghold. They brought up a train of heavy guns, probably from Maubeuge,<sup>1</sup> and sent a large body of troops northwards.

They were obliged, in view of the attacks on the fifth sector, to establish themselves in possession of Termonde, in order to cross the Scheldt at that point and cut all communication with the west. This is the explanation of the fresh attack on Termonde on the 16th and 17th September. On the 16th, at about half past five in the evening, the German troops renewed the bombardment of Termonde.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the inhabitants, who had returned to the town after the 10th September, immediately withdrew to the left bank of the Scheldt. So did the little Belgian garrison of two hundred and fifty men. The enemy aimed deliberately at the recently restored Church of Notre-Dame.<sup>3</sup> A dozen shells struck the building, causing irreparable damage.

Two hours after the bombardment began the Germans entered the town. Pushing forward, they once more seized upon a number of civilians—men, women, and children—belonging to the commune of St.-Gilles. Suddenly the civilians tried to escape. The Germans fired on them and used their bayonets; more than twenty were struck down in this manner.<sup>4</sup>

As they advanced into Termonde the Germans captured a large number of the inhabitants, whom they drove before them, with their hands up, to the brink of the River Scheldt. On the opposite bank the Belgians had entrenched themselves. In reply to the Belgians' fire, the Germans placed their prisoners in front of them, using their shoulders as rifle rests, in order to fire with greater precision. Among these prisoners was Dr. Van Winkel, local President of the Red Cross Society. The German soldier on his right was killed, the man on his left seriously wounded.

The Germans spent the evening in plundering the cellars of some houses which had escaped destruction during the sack of the 4th–6th September. On the Place du Marché au Lin, carpets, chairs, and cushions were spread, a piano was brought, and bonfires lighted. The

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, i. p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> *Evidence and Documents*, f8.

officers celebrated a perfect orgy all night long. The next day, between 4 and 4.45 p.m., the remains of the miserable town were given to the flames. The tower of the town-hall caught fire, and only the walls of the fine building remained standing. The archives and communal library were destroyed. All the pictures were saved, with the exception of three.

Belgians and Germans continued to observe one another on opposite banks of the river. The bridge of Termonde, already destroyed once by the Belgians, had been rebuilt, but was quickly mined by the defenders of the left bank. The Belgians, on their side, had set up a gun to enfilade the bridge at close quarters, and the defensive was very strong on both sides. The banks of the river were nothing but deep trenches, and the houses along them had been transformed into blockhouses for machine guns and small cannon. The Belgian lookout-men, always on the alert, endeavoured to surprise the slightest preparation of the enemy in the familiar ruins of the burnt town. From time to time a shadow was seen gliding between the ruined walls in the moonlight, and was at once greeted with a bullet. On the other side of the river also, little blue flames flashed like will-o'-the-wisps as the German crack shots aimed at heads seen above the Belgian parapet.<sup>1</sup>

After the sortie of 9th–13th September the Belgian High Command did not remain inactive. They knew that the network of railways in Belgium offered splendid facilities to the enemy for the victualling and transport of troops. It was decided to destroy these communications at certain specially important points. Seven volunteer detachments of a hundred cyclists each were formed, and these courageous soldiers were sent through the enemy lines to unpin or blow up the rails at places marked in advance on the map.<sup>2</sup> They left Antwerp on 22nd September each group for a separate zone of operations. Thanks to their boldness and skill, most of them succeeded in slipping through the German lines and accomplishing their object. They cut the principal lines in Limburg, Brabant, and Hainault, and disorganized the German transport. Most of these volunteer detachments made their way back safely to Antwerp; others amongst them were discovered, surrounded, killed, or taken prisoners.<sup>3</sup>

The Germans, true to their traditions, retaliated on the civilians of the place or the neighbourhood. For example, ten motor-cyclists unpinned the rails between Bilsen and Tongres. Two hours later, a German troop train was derailed. The Germans, in fury, entered Bilsen, shot down eight civilians, and set fire to part of the village.<sup>4</sup>

Another motor-cyclist column was surprised by the Germans in the act of blowing up the line at Tubize. Surrounded by the enemy, they sold their lives dear, and a few escaped and took refuge in a neighbouring village. Shortly afterwards one of these soldiers found stretched beside the line, near the scene of the skirmish, the bodies of two civilians shot by the Germans. Several houses had been burnt down in the vicinity.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "La mort de deux braves sur le pont de Termonde," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 1st October 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. pp. 26–7.

A third cyclist column cut the Brussels-Paris main line, not far from a farm occupied by the burgomaster of Montigny-lez-Lens.

The Germans took their revenge by burning down the parish priest's house and the burgomaster's farm, not neglecting to break open the safe and loot all they could carry away. The same fate befell some wretched little neighbouring farms.<sup>1</sup>

We must read in the light of these events the proclamation issued on 25th September by the Governor-General Von der Goltz Pasha as follows:—

Convoys of trucks and patrols have recently been surprised and attacked by the inhabitants in certain districts not actually occupied by German troops in greater or less force. I draw the attention of the public to the fact that a list of the towns and communes in which these attacks have occurred has been drawn up, and that they may expect their punishment when the German troops pass through their neighbourhood.

On the very day that these heroic cyclists carried out their dangerous duty the French High Command informed the Belgians that, as violent engagements were developing on the left wing of the Franco-British front, before Rheims and Roye, it seemed advisable to undertake a new attack in force on the German communications. There was reason to suppose that the enemy forces before Antwerp had been reduced by the despatch of reinforcements to France. The region to the west of Brussels was chosen by the Belgian High Command as the scene of the projected offensive movement. The cavalry division were despatched by rail to Ghent in order to move on Alost, while the main army, concentrated on the fourth sector, was to march southwards. During the preliminary movements of this fresh sortie the Belgians quickly learnt that, far from having been reduced, the German effectives before Antwerp had been increased, for the Germans had determined to begin the siege. Thus the projected sortie was not carried out, and the only result was a slight westerly movement of the main body of the army.

Nevertheless the High Command took a favourable opportunity of overwhelming an isolated German detachment. The 37th Brigade of Landwehr were engaged in the direction of Termonde. At once orders were given to the 4th Division to move on Termonde and, issuing from the town, to carry out a frontal attack. The 5th Division were to take the enemy on the right flank, while the cavalry division, which had been sent from Ghent towards Alost, attacked on the left wing. The German troops withdrew from the ruins of Termonde on the approach of the 4th Division, which passed through the town, along both banks of the Dendre, and there was a brisk engagement at St.-Gilles, Audeghem, and Wieze. But the 5th Division, fearing for their left flank, only engaged the enemy with weak forces. Two battalions tried to cut off the retreat of the 37th Landwehr by an advance from Buggenhout on Lebbecke. At nightfall Lebbecke was occupied; meanwhile the cavalry division pushed back the German detachments guarding the passages of the Dendre at Alost. There was a sharp struggle between the Belgians and Germans on opposite banks; some groups of Belgian cavalry pushed on as far as Assche.

But in spite of all these operations the brigade of Landwehr

<sup>1</sup> *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, ii. p. 86.

succeeded in escaping from the encircling movement which menaced them. They skirted Lebbeke on the west, in the dusk, and reaching Opwyck by cross-country roads, they rejoined the main body of their comrades.<sup>1</sup>

The engagement between Belgians and Germans at Alost took place on 26th and 27th September. The combatants were separated by the Dendre, which flows through the town. The Germans immediately revenged themselves upon the inhabitants of the part of Alost which they occupied. An old weaver who was carrying a pail of water across the street was bayoneted. In the poor quarter of Binnen Straat some houses were set on fire and two men killed. One of these latter was the father of a large family, who had shut the door of his house as his children were screaming with terror. He was called upon to open, and immediately killed in spite of his explanations. In the Rue des Trois Clefs about forty civilians were dragged from their homes, stripped of their valuables and money, and then driven to the river Dendre to serve as shields against the fire of their countrymen on the opposite bank. The Belgian lieutenant in charge of the mitrailleuse commanding the drawbridge signalled to these civilians to throw themselves on the ground. They did so, and at once the Belgians fired, forcing the Germans to retreat. The Germans thereupon killed eight or nine civilian prisoners. In the Rue des Trois Clefs seventeen houses were ignited, some with grenades, others by means of petrol, and some people who tried to fly from the burning houses were cut down. There were also cases of arson in the Rue Lenders and Rue de l'Argent. In the first of these streets about ten civilians were killed; in the Rue de l'Argent nine were despatched—bayoneted. In all, some forty persons were killed, including a young girl and two boys aged respectively twelve and sixteen years. A woman of eighty was terribly injured by a bayonet thrust.<sup>2</sup>

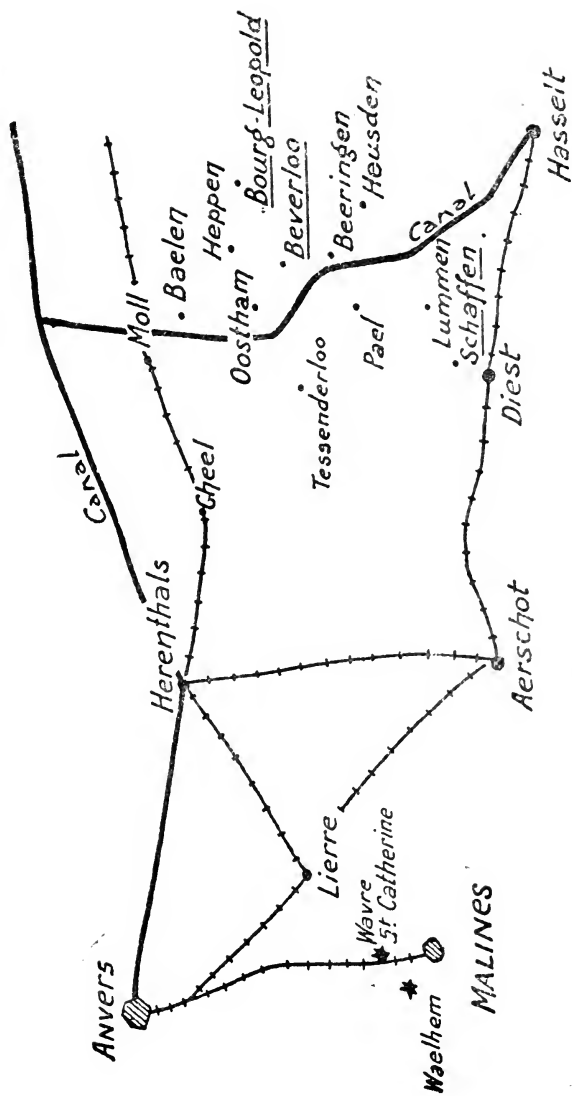
A German column of two to three hundred soldiers left Alost for the village of Erpe, taking twenty-five prisoners with them. Having reached Erpe, the Germans set fire to the houses and killed five or six civilians who tried to escape. Suddenly a Belgian car with a machine gun appeared on the scene: the Germans at once placed the twenty-five hostages from Alost before them on the road; two young fellows received wounds from the Belgian bullets before the machine-gun crew, perceiving that the civilians were being used as a screen, ceased their fire.<sup>3</sup>

At about the same time fighting took place in Campine between the Germans and the 4th Volunteer Regiment. These volunteers, quite fresh recruits, occupied the camp of Bourg-Léopold (Beverloo), and cleared the country-side of the German scouting parties who ventured so far. The presence of these volunteers in the Limburg district harassed the enemy considerably, and he resolved to rid himself of them at any cost. On 20th September there was sharp fighting at Schaffen-lez-Diest between four companies of these volunteers and the Germans. This

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 44-5; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence and Documents, depositions f12-f25; *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Evidence and Documents, depositions f26-f27; *Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique*, i. p. 104.



THE OPERATIONS OF THE BELGIAN VOLUNTEERS IN BELGIAN LIMBURG AND CAMPINE.

handful of recruits, commanded by a platoon-commander himself a recruit, kept the enemy at bay for nearly three hours, and only retreated as the Germans threatened to envelop their right wing. Their commander directed the retreat, and at the same time himself bore on his shoulders to the railway station at Schaffen the volunteer De Sonay, who had been disabled by a bullet wound in the thigh.<sup>1</sup>

There was another short skirmish at Lummen, where over fifty houses were fired by the enemy. On Saturday, 26th, a company of volunteers successfully defended the bridge over the canal at Beeringen, but were threatened by much larger forces in the direction of Heusden and of Pael. In order to check the German advance all the volunteer companies were sent during the night as reinforcements to Heppen, Beverloo, Beeringen, Oostham, and Tessengerloo. At five o'clock in the morning of 27th September the German artillery opened a violent fire on Beeringen. The church tower was struck by the first shot, and presently crumbled, while the houses collapsed one by one. The Belgian companies remained invisible in the trenches by the canal; a few Belgians replied to the enemy's fire from the immediate approaches to the village. Presently the Germans tried to cross the canal; the Belgians had not been able to destroy the bridge. But the Belgian sharpshooters fired from their excellent cover on the advancing enemy and forced them to draw back. However, the Germans had about 8,000 men to oppose to the Belgians' 1,000. At seven in the morning the Belgians abandoned Beeringen, which was burning brightly; they marched through the woods and reached the road to Baelen. From thence they could see pillars of smoke rising in the clear air of a glorious autumn day from the villages of Beeringen, Heppen, and Oostham, which the enemy had set fire to. Shortly after this the Germans entered Bourg-Léopold, and occupied the camp there. They set fire to some squares, while the volunteer company who had formed the guard escaped through the heather and fir woods.

At one o'clock the Belgians reached Moll; the enemy's approach was already signalled at Gheel and Meerhout. A group of volunteers occupied the railway station of Moll, while outposts were placed by the canal. They had hardly established themselves near the village when there was a burst of firing from the woods and coppices on all sides. The Germans were attacking the place. There was fierce fighting. A witness says: "While I live I shall never forget the terrible cries I heard; the shouting and execrations of the inhabitants and the assailants were blood-curdling and drowned the reports of the rifles. From afar one would have thought that hundreds of men, women, and children were slaughtering one another. It was frightful, but did not last long." The firing slowly died down, the Germans fell back. At twilight dead silence brooded over Moll, which the enemy had evacuated.

One body of Belgian volunteers then pushed on to Réthy. There all the houses in the Grand' Place, excepting only the burgomaster's, had been sacked and burnt by the uhlans. The fire in the De Keyser Hôtel had been put out, but all the rooms were full of broken furniture, torn garments, and cut mattresses. Incendiary liquids and pastilles had been used everywhere.

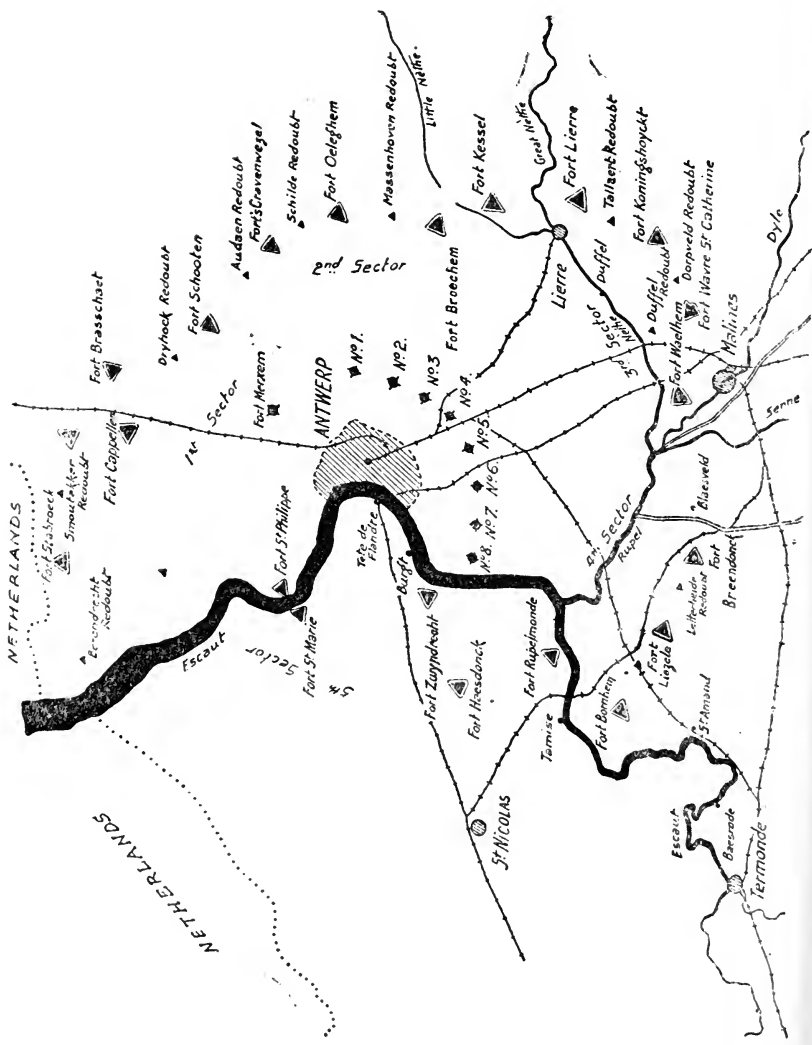
<sup>1</sup> Description by an eye-witness in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 20th-21st September 1915.



Another body of volunteers went to Hérenthals. The Belgians returned to Moll the next day, intending to recapture the camp at Bourg-Léopold, but urgent orders from Headquarters forced them to retire. In the night an officer motored to Hérenthals to blow up the railway line there.<sup>1</sup>

It was 28th September. The siege of Antwerp had begun. The Germans were already bombarding the forts of Waelhem and Wavre-Ste.-Catherine. The task of the volunteers in the Limburg district was abruptly ended.

<sup>1</sup> "La défense du camp de Beverloo" (Combat de Beeringen-Moll, 27th September 1914), in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 26th September 1916.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE SIEGE AND FALL OF ANTWERP

*(27th September–10th October)*

UP to the very moment that the forts of Waelhem and Wavre-Ste.-Catherine first felt the destructive power of the great German siege guns, no one believed that Antwerp could be taken by a besieging army. Unbounded confidence was felt in the "entrenched camp."

Certainly the defences were formidable. Their construction was begun by Brialmont, after designs made in 1859. At that time Belgium's future seemed chiefly threatened by the ambition of Napoleon III, and Brialmont aimed at converting the great commercial metropolis into an "entrenched camp," whither an army might retire in case of need to await help from England.

The forts were begun in 1861 and finished ten years later. The old ramparts were destroyed and replaced by avenues, around which new quarters of the town grew up. A new line of ramparts, with powerful bastions, and ditches as wide as a canal, was formed more than a mile beyond the line of the former walls. A circle of exterior forts was added at a distance of more than 3 kilometres. It might reasonably be supposed, having regard to the range of siege guns at that time, that these forts would offer adequate protection to the town and the port. On the north and west and at certain points to the east and south the defence could be perfected by inundating large tracts of country. The new entrenched camp had a circumference of 43 kilometres, and was the largest fortress in Europe. It was hoped that the benevolent neutrality of Holland would permit the victualling of the fortress-town by the Scheldt and make a complete investment impossible.

In order to give time for organizing the defence, two powerful forts were built on the Nèthe, to delay the approach of enemy forces on the south-west sector.

The war of 1870 upset these calculations. Strasburg and Metz passed into German hands, and this exposed the eastern frontier of France. In 1874 the French began the construction of their eastern fortress-line, from Verdun to Belfort, and thus closed the path of a possible German invasion from that direction. This at once made it natural to take into view the possibility of a German attack through Belgian territory. Consequently the fortresses of Liège and Namur were strengthened and the Antwerp fortifications had to be thoroughly overhauled. The time had come to replace earthworks and brick casemates with structures of concrete and steel. Moreover, Antwerp had

grown considerably, and Brialmont's ramparts constricted it unduly. Finally, the range of siege artillery had been greatly increased.

It was therefore proposed to demolish Brialmont's defences and carry the rampart along the line of the exterior forts of 1871, which would then serve as bastions. As a further protection against siege artillery, a new circle of exterior forts was to be erected at a distance of about 16 kilometres beyond the new ramparts. These were to be beyond the Rupel-Nèthe line, towards Malines, on the south side. To the north they were to be only a cannon-shot away from the Dutch frontier. The entire outer circle was to have a circumference of 96 kilometres.

Brialmont opposed this plan. He considered that not a mere garrison but a veritable army would be required for the effective defence of such a large enceinte. He was not listened to, and the plan was put in hand. The outer enceinte was only finished on the very eve of the Great War, and it is reported that the armament of the forts was not complete when the invaders crossed the frontiers.<sup>1</sup>

The outer fortifications describe three-quarters of a circle round Antwerp, starting from the right bank of the Scheldt and touching the river again to the north-east of the town. Between the larger forts are redoubts as rallying points for the defence of the intervals. Between the Scheldt and the Dyle, starting from the right bank, we find first of all the fort of Bornhem, then the Puers redoubt, the fort of Liezele, the Letterheide redoubt, and the fort of Breendonck. Between the Dyle and the Little Nèthe are the fort of Waelhem, the Duffel redoubt, which lies behind this fort and the next (namely, Wavre-Ste.-Catherine), then the Dorpveld redoubt and the fort of Koningshoyckt, the Tallaert redoubt and the two forts of Lierre and Kessel. Across the Little Nèthe the line of defence is continued by the fort of Broechem, the Massenhoven redoubt, the Oelegem fort, the Schilde redoubt, the S'Gravenwezel fort, the Audaen redoubt, the Schooten fort, and the Dryhoek redoubt; then come Fort Brasschaet, Fort Ertbrand and the Smoutakker redoubt, Fort Stabroeck and Berendrecht redoubt. To the rear of Forts Ertbrand and Brasschaet, Fort Cappellen and the Oorderen redoubt strengthen the defences. Across the Scheldt, Forts Ruppelmonde, Haesdonck, Zwyndrecht, and Cruybeke defend the approaches to the left bank. The crossing of the river to the north-west of the city is commanded by Fort Ste.-Marie on the left bank and by Fort St.-Philippe on the right.

The interior enceinte consisted of eight forts, numbered from 8 to 1, and continued to the north-east by Merxem fort and Oorderen redoubt.

As soon as the Germans had crossed the frontier, the entrenched camp of Antwerp was prepared for defence.<sup>2</sup>

Every possible impediment to the lines of fire was ruthlessly levelled to the ground: hamlets, villas, churches, isolated farms, trees etc. The houses and trees were sprinkled with paraffin or other combustibles and set on fire; others were dynamited. The pavements were torn up and the paving-stones used for barricades. Miles on miles of barbed wire were stretched around, and in certain places

<sup>1</sup> John Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. iii. pp. 173-6.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 29-32.

the wire was strongly electrified. Thousands of branches of trees were sharpened into stakes and stuck in the earth to impale the advancing enemy. Beyond these traps and barbed-wire entanglements the potato and beet fields were sown with mines. Trenches and barricades were everywhere. Along the streams and canals parapets were built up of sand-bags. Each bridge and viaduct was provided with a heavy charge of explosives. Across the main roads wire was drawn in expectation of the raids of German armoured motor-cars. The walls of certain blocks of houses were pierced with loopholes and crenelated; machine guns were posted behind them. At night the searchlights swept this zone of desolation, and made all surprise in it impossible. Locomotives were kept under full steam at the termini, ready to launch at top speed along the rails and dash themselves to pieces against carefully prepared obstacles, thus blocking the lines and disorganizing the enemy's transport.<sup>1</sup>

The attack on Antwerp began on 27th September. At this time the Germans had received large reinforcements of all arms, especially siege artillery and sappers, set free by the fall of Maubeuge.<sup>2</sup> It is certain that the siege guns of 28 cm. and the Austrian mortars of 30.5 cm. were used in the siege of Antwerp.<sup>3</sup> Doubt has been thrown on the presence of the great 42 cm., but they were certainly used too.<sup>4</sup> The reinforced concrete platforms necessary for the support of these guns in action had been built up during the last half of September behind the embankment of the railway from Malines to Louvain.

The besieging army comprised the 3rd Reserve Army Corps, which had been definitely recalled to the Belgian front, the 26th and 37th Brigades of Landwehr, a division of marine infantry, the 1st and 4th Ersatz Divisions, a Bavarian division, a brigade of foot artillery, and a brigade of sappers, with full siege equipment. Probably in all 125,000<sup>5</sup> men, provided with numerous field guns. General Von Beseler was in command.

At the moment when the siege operations began, the main Belgian army had moved westward, as we have seen, to attempt an offensive, which was shown to be impossible. The 2nd, 3rd, and 6th Divisions had each left one detachment, consisting of an infantry regiment, a cavalry regiment, a cyclist company, and a group of batteries each, on the third sector, to meet possible attacks there.<sup>6</sup> The 2nd Division was held in reserve of the third and fourth sectors.

<sup>1</sup> London *Illustrated War News*, *passim* (with photographs), and E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 91, 95; *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 171, 230.

<sup>4</sup> An officer belonging to the garrison of the Lierre fort writes: "We heard at 12.20 a sinister whistling at first, then a roar like the rush of an express train at full speed. The projectile fell on top of the barracks and exploded violently: a rain of concrete and masonry fell on all the fort. We had just received our first 42-cm. shell—the first of fifty-seven. The shell-holes measured 8 to 10 metres across. The shell tops were flung up 50 metres and fell to earth again like new projectiles. . . . One was weighed and measured. It was 388 mm. across and weighed 66 kilogrammes." See "L'agonie du fort de Lierre: Souvenirs d'un témoin," in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 14th March 1916.

<sup>5</sup> This was the estimate of most of the war correspondents at the time, and is probably accurate: see J. Buchan's *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. iii. p. 172 and note.

<sup>6</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 49.

And, indeed, the first German attack was directed against the third sector. At the news of the German advance the Belgians had evacuated Malines, leaving only a detachment of the 1st Division, nine companies and three batteries, well to the south of that town.<sup>1</sup> On Sunday, 27th September, the German cannon opened fire on Malines—it was their third bombardment of the town—at the moment when the inhabitants were at Mass. A panic ensued. The population who had either remained in the town or gone back after the second bombardment hastily seized their most valued belongings and set forth for Antwerp. A lamentable procession! There can be no doubt that the Germans counted on the demoralizing impression which the arrival of these terrified fugitives must necessarily produce inside the fortress.

Their arrival also aggravated the (already very difficult) task of the Antwerp civil and military authorities.<sup>2</sup> The Belgian detachment posted in the neighbourhood of Malines was pushed back, and in the evening the Germans occupied the town as a base for their siege operations.

On Monday, 28th September, the besiegers advanced all along the line, occupying Alost on the extreme left wing and Heyst-op-den-Berg on the right.<sup>3</sup> Then the heavy siege guns were brought into action. Cannon of enormous calibre began to bombard the Waelhem and Wavre-Ste.-Catherine forts. The most powerful of this artillery was certainly focused on the third sector, where the enemy tried to break the lines of the defence. Very soon the resistance of Forts Waelhem and Wavre-Ste.-Catherine was seriously impaired by the fire of the 30·5-cm. and the 42-cm. guns. This artillery had an immense range. Some of the fuses found among the ruins of the bombarded forts were sighted at 15,200 metres (over nine English miles). Reconnaissances made by Belgian airmen proved that the German heavy guns were at Boortmeerbeek.<sup>4</sup> The concrete and armour-plate of the forts had only been calculated to resist the fire of 21-cm. guns at most.

The adjustment of the enemy's range was carried out by means of medium calibre guns, and observations were made from captive balloons. When once the position and effect of the fire had been ascertained, the Germans began to use their heaviest guns.<sup>5</sup> At the first shell, a vault of the Wavre-Ste.-Catherine fort was pierced and the passages of the interior were filled by the horrible odour of the gas of the shells. At the end of the day the concrete mass was cracked and the collapse of part of the structure was imminent.<sup>6</sup>

In the Waelhem fort a cupola of 15 cm. was put out of action and the telephonic communication with the observation post cut off.<sup>7</sup>

The Belgian High Command then hastily ordered the 1st and

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of the Siege," published in the *Morning Post*, by their Special Correspondent, 9th October 1914.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> "Les Aviateurs Belges," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 2nd January 1915; "L'agonie du fort de Lierre," *ibid.*, 14th March 1916.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 86-8.

<sup>6</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 50; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> "Notes d'un occupant du fort de Waelhem," in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 19th November 1914.

2nd Divisions into the third sector (Forts Waelhem-Lierre). The 3rd and 6th Divisions remained in the fourth sector; the 4th Division occupied Termonde, and the 5th Division constituted the general reserve.<sup>1</sup>

All night long the bombardment of the German howitzers continued.

On Tuesday, 29th September, the Germans attacked the fourth sector; they rolled back the vanguards of the 3rd and 6th Divisions, which, however, halted about 1,500 metres from the main line of the defence. Then the heavy siege artillery was brought into play. The 28-cm. guns hurled some fifty shells on the Breendonck bridge, while the giant projectiles fell on the district just behind the front, between Ruysbroeck and Willebroeck. In the afternoon a German column was seen to reach the head of Blaesveld bridge, but the attack failed, dispersed by the artillery of the defence.<sup>2</sup>

On the Waelhem-Lierre sector a bombardment of great violence still raged; the Belgian garrisons were forced to withdraw to the very edge of the forts, owing to the force of the explosions and the number of the shells. Fort Waelhem, at certain moments, was bombarded at the rate of ten shells a minute.<sup>3</sup> Its defenders had succeeded in restoring the telephonic communication, and the fort still replied on the morning of the 29th. The commandant, Dewit, himself was at the telephone. At about four o'clock a second cupola was put out of service. For an hour the fort had fired on the railway, where the lookouts thought they perceived enemy activity, and the communications on the Malines-Louvain railway had also been destroyed. At about half past 4 p.m. the commandant, stifling his emotion, asked for help: the ammunition magazine had exploded and seventy-five of his men were horribly burned. The wounded needed help, which was expected from Duffel. This assistance soon arrived, and fire from the fort died away. The watchtower was bombarded at half past six, and its occupants were forced to leave it. There was thus no means of observing the enemy's movements. Nevertheless, during the night the commandant succeeded in repairing some of the cupolas, after a fashion, and in firing in the direction which seemed the right one.<sup>4</sup> In this day the garrison lost nine killed and sixty wounded, as well as the men buried in the ruined portion of the fort.<sup>5</sup>

Fort Wavre-Ste.-Catherine was also terribly battered. A magazine of ammunition exploded. The cupolas crumbled one by one, and the garrison, driven out of shelter after shelter, was forced to evacuate the fort at about six o'clock in the evening.

Besides the forts, the neighbouring outworks, redoubts, and trenches between the forts were deluged with huge projectiles at intervals of five minutes. The third sector forts replied vigorously, but as the outposts had been forced to withdraw into the shelter of the works themselves, it was extremely difficult to keep the enemy's fire under observation. Only a few fugitive signs could be obtained from the

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 49, 50.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> "Notes d'un occupant du fort de Waelhem," loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 87.

armour-plated observatories.<sup>1</sup> The movements and the positions of the German infantry were most carefully covered, as at Namur. No attack seemed pending; only shells, and more shells, and the ceaseless thunder of the guns.

On the evening of the 29th September Fort Wavre-Ste.-Catherine might be considered *hors-de-combat*. A thirty hours' bombardment had disposed of its resistance.<sup>2</sup>

This circumstance was important and had a threatening significance. Certainly a breach had been opened in the first line of defence; but this was the least misfortune. It was evident that all the other forts must speedily share the same fate; they were condemned to see themselves ground to powder, for they had no means of replying adequately to the formidable German artillery.

Were the troops in the trenches and the field artillerymen, posted in the intervals, to be condemned, as at Namur, to watch impotently the progressive annihilation of the defence? All seemed to point to the fall of Liège, Namur, and Maubeuge being repeated under the same conditions at Antwerp.

There was one chance of help—from the Allied armies. But in spite of the desire of the Allies to relieve Antwerp,<sup>3</sup> and the rapid progress of their forces on the left, they were still at least 200 kilometres away. The hope of their arrival in time appeared chimerical.<sup>4</sup>

The cruel evidence of facts was overwhelming. Antwerp was not impregnable, and could not, in spite of preconceived opinion, for long form a safe refuge for the field army. The fate of the army must be separated from that of Antwerp.

On 29th September there was a conference between the Minister for War and the chiefs of the army, at which it was settled that the defence of the town should be exclusively entrusted to its garrison, and that the field army should forthwith withdraw to the left bank, to escape investment and possible capture. The King, the Ministers, and the General Staff were completely in accord in the matter.

The retreat of the field army was to begin on 2nd October, and the troops were to take up a position on the Dendre, there to await their junction with the northern divisions of the Allies, whose line had been extended to Arras, and even as far as Lille.<sup>5</sup>

The first thing to be done in view of this retreat was to remove the base westwards. Ostend was chosen on account of the facilities offered for supplies by its position on the sea-coast. Immediately the removal of the base was taken in hand: the wounded, the prisoners, the stores of every kind, ammunition, food, sanitary appliances, the army corps dépôts, the recruits of the latest levy, the volunteers still in training, the workshops and all other units comprising the base were transported to Ostend. This was no easy task. Only one line of

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 50; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> See on the plan to relieve Antwerp by a Franco-English force, making from Ghent a flank attack on the besiegers, the articles of Mr. Winston Churchill, *Antwerp: the story of its siege and fall*, in the *Sunday Pictorial* for 19th and 25th November 1916.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> These particulars are taken from an officially inspired article in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* for November 1915, entitled "Les Anglais au siège d'Anvers."



rails was available; and this started from the Tête de Flandre, on the left bank of the Scheldt, and passed through St.-Nicolas and Ghent. To reach the left bank the transports had to cross the bridge of the railway at Tamise; and to reach the Tamise bridge the trains must traverse the Willebroeck bridge, right under the fire of the Germans. Nevertheless, the secret was so well kept, and the organization so masterly, that the trains slipped through, with all lights out, on every night from 29th September to 7th October, without being perceived or attacked by the besiegers.<sup>1</sup>

The lines of retreat had also to be protected. The troops of the 4th Division occupied the line of the Scheldt, at Baesrode, Termonde and Schoonaerde, to keep open communications with the West. The division of cavalry was sent to Wetteren, and, based on this place, were to guard all the left bank of the Dendre, where the field army was to take up its new position on 3rd October.<sup>2</sup>

On 30th September the Germans renewed their attacks on the fourth sector. The bridgehead at Blaesveld was again the objective of two German attacks in force, between the Dyle and the Willebroeck canal. The men of the 4th Chasseurs and the 12th Line Regiment bravely drove the Germans back with heavy losses. Further in advance the outposts of the 6th Division also rolled back an attack. The German batteries kept up a cannonade of Fort Liezele and Fort Breendonck; they used 10·5-cm. and 15-cm. shells, and even heavier artillery was employed against Breendonck. This bombardment had no success, and the Belgians replied to it with vigour.<sup>3</sup>

The situation was less good on the third sector. A deluge of shells descended upon all that line. All the forts, including Fort Wavre-Ste.-Catherine, which had been silenced on the previous evening, were bombarded by enormous shells; the noise and shock of the shells was terrible, and this lasted for five full hours. The intervals between the forts had their full share of this tempest of projectiles of every calibre. The men of the 1st Division, who were exposed to the demoralizing effects of this bombardment without adequate means of protection or reply, saw earthworks and trenches crumble round them like a pack of cards. Covered and half buried in the heaps of soil cast up by the explosions, they gave way and fell back. The effect of the shells on the permanent works was equally destructive: in Fort Lierre, the shock of a great shell-burst was so overwhelming that a cupola of 5·7 cm. was forced out of its shaft.

This Lierre fort had opened fire from its 15-cm. cupolas at 2 p.m. on 28th September, and had continued to fire on all the enemy positions within its range till nightfall. On the morrow the Germans cannonaded it with 13·5-cm. guns, but although sixty-four shells struck the fort, they did comparatively little damage.

During the night Fort Lierre was able to assist Fort Koningsroyck and Tallaert redoubt. It was only on 30th September, at half past twelve, that the first 42-cm. shell descended on the fort; it was followed every six minutes by others of the same calibre straight on till 6 p.m. The 5·7-cm. armour-plate was hurled into the air and fell twenty yards away. A giant shell had fallen before the postern

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 59.

door, and the displacement of air had caused this damage. A 5·7-cm. gun used against aircraft was flung off its emplacement; the gun carriage was overturned and one wheel smashed.<sup>1</sup>

For the moment all but one of the Koningshoyckt guns were reduced to silence: part of the fort was in ruins. The Dorpveld and Boschbeek redoubts were shattered by the terrible shocks. The occupants of the forts say that the massive concrete structure seemed to plunge bodily into the earth as the shells fell upon it. The men could hardly keep on their feet to serve their guns in the cupolas. There was no respite. One of the Boschbeek cupolas was struck two hundred times.<sup>2</sup>

Through all this the intrepid Dewit still held his Fort Waelhem, which was partly in ruins and seamed with holes and cracks. He still worked his guns, and received a good deal of "attention" from the enemy.<sup>3</sup> Shell-holes of three and a half metres were torn in the cupolas: they were stopped up as well as could be managed.

At one moment, seeing the danger to the fort and wishing to draw the enemy's fire, the field guns—"like little destroyers taking part in a Dreadnought action"<sup>4</sup> says an eye-witness—concentrated round Waelhem and opened a violent barrage fire.

But Commandant Dewit was preparing for his last blow: he summoned his officers round him, and declared that as so many of the guns were put out of action he ordered a certain number of his men to retreat, but would himself continue the defence with a reduced garrison. Most of the men refused to leave the fort, and only did so at their chief's express order.

At 4 p.m. the German shells destroyed the city reservoirs behind the fort. The water poured out in torrents and filled the neighbouring trenches. A field battery was almost submerged, but was rescued by the men from its dangerous position, and half an hour later took up a fresh position from which it continued a brisk fire.<sup>5</sup> The destruction of the Waelhem reservoir caused serious trouble with the water supply in Antwerp, and in case of any large fires caused by the cannonade, it would be impossible to cope with the danger. The Germans had indeed aimed well.

At nightfall Fort Waelhem was in a most critical position. All the field artillery which was supporting its fire was sent to the right flank towards Rumpst, and from this new position opened a violent fire in order to draw the German cannonade and relieve the fort, which had temporarily ceased fire. This stratagem succeeded, and the garrison used their respite to repair such damage in the interior of the work as could be made good and to prepare to continue their defence.<sup>6</sup>

The German fire ceased at last when night fell. The garrisons of the forts at once applied themselves to filling up the shell-holes and clearing the entrances of the cupolas. The commandant of Fort Wavre-St.-Catherine, on attempting to reoccupy his work, found it almost

<sup>1</sup> "L'agonie du fort de Lierre," op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 52-3; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>3</sup> "Notes d'un occupant," etc., loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> "Journal of the Siege": special correspondent of *Morning Post*, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

entirely demolished. The heavy armour-plate of a cupola of a 15-cm. gun had disappeared, and fire raged beneath the ruins.

Up to this moment no German infantry had appeared on the third sector. But to the west, towards Termonde, the enemy were attempting to force the passage of the Scheldt. At Termonde itself they tried to cross the bridge. The Belgians held the approach on the left bank. The night of 1st October was fine and starlit; the air had the autumnal clearness. The firing had died down after the fury of the day. The troops by the bridgehead, being in their shelters, were enjoying the fresh air of evening. Suddenly a sentinel sounded the alarm. He had just seen a thick dark mass, indistinct in the moonlight, moving on the opposite bank. The dark mass seemed to move towards the bridge. Without doubt the Germans were attempting to cross the Scheldt. Instantly infantry and gunners leapt into their trenches and opened a furious fire. The advancing mass swayed and broke under the volleys. Some of the German infantry, with remarkable courage, advanced still behind mattresses and made for the bridge, but they staggered and were seen to fall in struggling heaps before the machine-gun fire. The mattresses caught fire and lit up the horrors of the scene. Two more feeble attempts were made, but had no success: the Belgians blew up the bridge in time.

In reply, the German guns were turned on the approaches to Termonde bridge. For an hour the Belgians now faced without flinching this rain of fire. Sub-Lieutenant Hiernaux fell, struck by a bullet between the eyes as he was making observations of the enemy's position. The quartermaster Francotte, in command of the gun crew, had Hiernaux's body carried into a neighbouring shelter, and took his place at the gun; all night he commanded and rallied a hard-driven crew.

The neighbouring trenches were rendered uninhabitable by the gas generated by the shell explosions, and had to be evacuated for the moment. But the Germans could not cross the Scheldt.<sup>1</sup>

On the morrow, at the same spot, and under the same circumstances, Sub-Lieutenant Mayat, the friend of Hiernaux, met death by a bullet in the temple. The two friends were buried side by side in the little graveyard of Grembergen.<sup>2</sup>

On the night of 30th September all the Belgian artillery which had not been put out of action carried out an energetic cannonade of all the enemy positions within their range. This bombardment took place for twenty minutes at 2 a.m. and again at 4 a.m. A Zeppelin was seen clearly outlined against the sky above Fort Broechem; it threw bombs on the fort, but they did no special damage.<sup>3</sup>

The next day the third and fourth sectors were cannonaded by the German big guns. Fort Breendonck was bombarded for about five hours by 28-cm. guns without serious results; Letterheide and Bornhem redoubts by 10·5 and 15-cm. guns.<sup>4</sup> The bridge over the Ruppel received the fire of 13-cm. artillery. As the shells fell whistling through the air, the working-class population of Boom fled panic-

<sup>1</sup> "La mort de deux braves au pont de Termonde," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91; "L'agonie du fort de Lierre," in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 16th March 1916.

stricken in the direction of Antwerp. As though the Germans had aimed only at this result, the bombardment of Boom immediately ceased. The Germans wished to increase the difficulties and labours of the civil and military authorities in the city and to depress and demoralize the spirit of the defenders by the largest possible influx of terrified fugitives. With the same object they fired a few shells over Lierre, destroying the Red Cross station there and killing some wounded men; from Lierre, too, the civilians streamed into Antwerp.<sup>1</sup>

The bombardment of the third sector had begun again at 8 a.m., and was now extended to Fort Kessel; the works, the batteries in the intervals, and the salient points were deluged with shells. As on the day before, Fort Lierre was heavily bombarded from 1 p.m. onwards; a shell descended every six minutes. About three o'clock a 15-cm. cupola was put out of action by a displacement of concrete; one after another the shells fell into it. The commandant of the artillery in the fort fell into a shell-hole and had to be taken to the infirmary. The officer commanding the infantry, overcome with fatigue and exhaustion and poisoned by the shell-fumes, fell into a coma. The effect of the fumes was agonizingly painful and overpowering; some men fainted, others wept, others, again, were stunned and stupefied, deaf, beyond knowing or caring what happened. Neither exhortation nor threats could restore their moral. They had become a passive herd, acting only mechanically. They only awoke from this lethargy at the news that an infantry attack was pending.

Fort Lierre received sixty 42-cm. shells.<sup>2</sup> Fort Kessel, by a barrage fire, brought an infantry attack to a dead stop.<sup>3</sup> Further along the line Fort Broechem was also in action. A war correspondent, who visited this part of the defences, speaks of them in these terms:—

I went out to Fort Broechem and then along the line of similar forts to the northward which encircled Antwerp. They are low-lying forts. . . . A grassy glacis slopes up to them, and for a great stretch in front the ground is absolutely cleared, so that there is not a particle of cover for troops approaching to attack them. The intervals of the forts are scored by entrenchments, and a few small hills, or rather hillocks, in the vicinity are honeycombed with trenches and bomb-proof shelters. . . . The Belgian artillery works from behind the forts. . . . It was not easy to find out the guns. . . . I practically walked on top of them before I knew I was near them. All the guns were covered with branches so as to conceal them from aeroplanes, and the horses were underneath a little bower. . . . Meanwhile a bombardment by heavy guns was going on against the forts, and at one time in the afternoon the whole orchestra of battle was playing simultaneously. There was the piccolo of rifle fire, the rattle of the mitrailleuses, the bang-bang of the field guns, and the great bass bang of the enormous siege guns. Wishing to get a view of the entire scene, I went back to a little eminence close to Fort Broechem. Close by was a small village, or a cluster of cottages, and behind the shelter of the houses were knots of villagers who had not yet left, and there were little children playing in an open space, and inquisitive people looking out of their doors. I actually met two cavalrymen patrolling the place, and they told me that their duty was simply to keep going round trying to prevent these people being killed by shrapnel. . . . From the little eminence I reached I could see a great column of smoke rising from Lierre, and another great column from some village to the eastward. Great balloons of smoke and dust were rising from the slopes of two of the forts, and the white puffballs of exploding shrapnel were showing in various directions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Journal of the Siege," *Morning Post*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "L'agonie du fort de Lierre," loc. cit.; also the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 16th March 1916.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> George Lynch in the *Observer*, 11th October 1914.

Along the whole Lierre-Waelhem sector clouds of smoke whirled and spread above burning villages, and the air vibrated with the rush and burst of shells. The heavy rumble of the guns of the forts and the furious barking of the field batteries mingled with the crash of the enemy's shells. When a 42-cm. shell—which the Belgians called an "express-train" or a "goods-train"—fell in a field, a geyser of earth and soil was hurled into the air to a height of over two hundred feet. When they fell into a river or canal they produced a huge waterspout, and if a hamlet was struck it was almost wiped out at one stroke. At Waelhem one of these giant shells struck a house where a detachment of soldiers was sleeping. The upper story collapsed completely, burying in its fall the mangled bodies of fifteen soldiers, as well as nine others who were on the ground floor.<sup>1</sup>

Duffel station was struck two hundred and fifty times in two and a half hours.<sup>2</sup> Here a distressing incident occurred. In Duffel is an asylum for insane women, which contains three hundred patients. When the bombardment threatened the buildings the Sisters of Charity who tended these unfortunates were forced to leave their residence and to conduct their charges across a shell-swept space to the train for Antwerp. Escorted by soldiers, the sad procession crossed the fields, but though shells were bursting around them, the efforts of soldiers and nuns to quicken the pace of the madwomen were in vain. Some screamed piercingly, threw themselves on the ground, or tried to run away. The majority stopped dead, laughed wildly, and clapped their hands like children. With muttered oaths the soldiers forced them forward, and the nuns gently entreated them to hurry. In spite of the terrible danger they were entrained without a single accident.<sup>3</sup>

The bombardment of the outer works still continued; Waelhem, Wavre-Ste.-Catherine, Lierre, and Koningshoyekt, and the Tallaert, Boschbeek, and Dorpveld redoubts were showered with shells, and on this occasion it was the prelude to an infantry attack. Soon thick masses of grey uniforms moved forward, under cover of a formidable barrage fire. At certain points they drove before them herds of maddened cattle. The first wave of assailants penetrated into the line of fortifications to the west of Wavre-Ste.-Catherine, behind Forts Waelhem and Wavre itself. The men of the Belgian 1st Division advanced in vain to reoccupy these trenches: the enemy had established himself too firmly to be dislodged; the Belgians could not break his resistance. On the left the 2nd Division was shattered by a terrible artillery fire and driven back on the Nèthe.

Fort Koningshoyekt repulsed all attacks; but Boschbeek redoubt had to be evacuated, and Dorpveld was seized at 5 p.m. by the Germans, who occupied solidly the central block of the work and mounted their machine guns. The Belgian garrison were inside the redoubt, imprisoned in its ruins.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of this enlarged breach in the defence, the Germans met a determined resistance from Fort Lierre. The 1st Brigade, which had been sent to reinforce the garrison carabiniers, there met all

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 172, 175-6.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 91-3.

assaults without flinching. The announcement that the German foot-soldiers were advancing to the attack on Lierre, supported by their field artillery, electrified the garrison. The cupolas were at once filled: fusiliers and machine gunners and riflemen took their place in the firing-line. All the garrison, even including the sick, took part in the fight, and the officer in command of the fusiliers, revived after his coma, took up his post on the ramparts. A terrific fire from the fort stopped the German rush about nine in the evening. Two hours later a second attack broke before the torrent of lead poured forth unceasingly from the fort.<sup>1</sup>

The Military Governor of Antwerp gave orders for the occupation of the supporting position established between Fort Koningshoyekt and Duffel redoubt, in order to protect the right flank of the troops defending—and still successfully defending—the terrain between Koningshoyekt and Lierre. These orders were carried out in the evening, and at night, at two o'clock, the enemy attacked again between Fort Lierre and Tallaert redoubt. The outposts of the 1st Line Regiment were obliged to give ground for a moment, but succeeded in retaking their trenches. Enemy machine guns deluged with bullets the line of fire in front of Fort Lierre. The Belgian fusiliers replied so furiously that their rifles became red-hot. The cannon of Fort Lierre fired at top pressure; the noise was deafening for two hours. At half past four the garrison rejoiced to see red rockets rise above the German lines: the signal of retreat!<sup>2</sup> The third attack on the intervals had failed; not so much as a line of barbed wire was cut. The torpor which had crushed the garrison during the 1st October gave way to a blend of satisfaction and hope. They were almost happy—but mortally tired. The fire-control did not answer questions; the staff were all sound asleep. The officer, stretched on a mattress, staggered when he tried to stand up. Ten minutes' peace had been enough to send everybody off in a heavy sleep.<sup>3</sup>

Abroad, nothing had as yet transpired concerning the critical military situation of Antwerp. The censorship had sternly stopped all telegrams calculated to cause anxiety or indicate the true state of affairs. Thus the London *Times* felt able to take the following view of the situation in its editorial of 1st October:—

The German operations against Antwerp arouse increasing interest, though we are not at all sure that their importance is at present commensurate with the noise of the bombarding batteries. It is incorrect to speak of the German movements as amounting to a siege. The assailants are only firing at the three forts of Waelhem, Wavre, and St. Catherine in the south-eastern segment of the ring of fortifications, and they do not appear to be doing very much damage. Some German infantry marched on Tuesday against the trenches between the adjacent forts of Liezele and Breendonck, but were speedily repulsed. It is highly improbable that the Landsturm troops now in Belgium could make any real impression upon the outer defences of Antwerp while the Belgian field army remains in such vigorous condition. Even if the biggest German siege guns were brought up, and if the forts were knocked to pieces, we doubt whether the enemy would find themselves very much nearer the Place Verte. . . .

<sup>1</sup> "L'agonie du fort de Lierre," loc. cit., and the account by the officer commanding the fusiliers in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 16th March 1916.

<sup>2</sup> "Récit du commandant des fusiliers," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 16th March 1916.

<sup>3</sup> "L'agonie du fort de Lierre," loc. cit.; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 92.

We do not think that there is any need to worry about Antwerp. Doubtless the graceful spire of Antwerp Cathedral and the beautiful Church of St. James make the mouths of the Huns water. The city presents incomparable opportunities for the more destructive side of German "culture." We can imagine the pretexts which would be gleefully invented for pumping petrol into the Plantin Museum. Every German regiment now in Belgium appears to possess a special machine for squirting petrol into buildings, and to include a squad of methodical incendiaries trained in the peculiar arts of the higher civilization as expounded in the University of Berlin. Apparently, too, each German column has attached to it a number of mobilized cinematograph actors, who upon occasion impersonate civilians firing upon the soldiery. We can think of no other explanation of some of the episodes which have ensured for the German invaders of Belgium an ineffaceable place in history. Happily these products of "the warfare of to-day" are not likely to get anywhere nearer Antwerp than they are at present.<sup>1</sup>

In Antwerp itself the confidence of the general public was undisturbed. The papers were full of reassuring news: all allusion to the exact situation beyond the Nèthe was excluded. The noise of the cannonade echoed through the streets. The wounded were brought into the town by night, under cover of the darkness; cafés and hotels were full of war correspondents and Staff officers. The inhabitants believed in the strength of the forts, and had a hazy anticipation of some unlooked-for aid.

The second day of the month of October was spent in counter-attacks by the 1st and 2nd Divisions, who endeavoured to retake the positions which had been lost between Forts Waelhem and Koningshoyekt. The breach opened in the lines of fortifications on the left bank of the Nèthe still widened.

Fort Waelhem still held out. The day before the garrison had made what repairs were possible and kept up a smart fire from their remaining guns. Commandant Dewit, although wounded, refused to leave the fort. From the beginning of the bombardment the defenders had been without either bread or light, for one of the first shells had annihilated the bakehouse and the main electric machinery. The fort kept silence for so long that the Germans approached it closely, thinking all was over with the garrison. They came as far as the moat, and stayed there. The commander of the fort turned all the remaining guns of Waelhem on the foe at short range. The machine guns mowed down their men and the shells smashed their artillery. It was the end of this heroic resistance. On Friday the German shells destroyed the bridge and cut off the garrison's only line of retreat. Resistance being useless, the defenders quitted the fort by means of ladders into the rear moat. They were haggard, blackened with powder and fumes, and furious at their inability to continue the struggle. That day Koningshoyekt and Lierre fell; so did the Dorpveld and Tallaert redoubts.

We have seen that the garrison of Dorpveld had been entombed in its ruins since the night before. The Germans had blocked up the air-holes and begun to mine the subterranean vaults in which the Belgians, perceiving these preparations, stoically awaited death by suffocation. About 4 a.m. a mine exploded, blowing to pieces part of the redoubt. Through this breach some members of the garrison escaped, under the fire of the German machine guns on the central structure. The commandant and the last defenders were at their

<sup>1</sup> *Times* of 1st October 1914, first leader.

posts when a second mine blew up the entire work and buried them all under the ruins.<sup>1</sup>

Fort Koningshoyckt had repulsed an infantry attack the day before, and now the German fire was concentrated upon it at a range beyond the carrying power of its own guns; from here the shells fell ceaselessly, destroying the fort; the engine-room caved in; the machine gun shelters were crushed; part of the frontage crumbled. At noon a magazine blew up; at 2.30 p.m. the whole fort shared the same fate, shaking the ground for miles around in all directions.

Tallaert redoubt also exploded. Lierre still remained. For six hours on end it was bombarded with huge projectiles, at the rate of twelve an hour. At noon only the postern entry was uninjured. Soon the last cupola was useless; the others had been blocked or destroyed. The corridors were mostly heaped high with ruins; at six o'clock in the afternoon the ruins were evacuated. Three officers, two doctors, and one hundred and five soldiers retired across the Nèthe. As one of the officers said:—

*To fight is nothing—if one can hit back! But the range of their artillery is immensely superior to ours!*<sup>2</sup> They were safe from our fire. We were reduced to folding our arms and waiting till death took us.

This time of waiting in a dark recess of masonry which one knows to be doomed to destruction, and which every six minutes risks being annihilated by a projectile whose approach one *hears*, is a slow torture. It affected the strongest nerves; and the heroism of those who waited thus for death only because they had been told to do so is all the more splendid because it was displayed in darkness and silence, and the world did not know of it till all was over.<sup>3</sup>

On the left bank of the Nèthe most of the permanent forts had been by now destroyed.<sup>4</sup> Only Fort Kessel and Duffel redoubt still held out; the latter *fortin* had been bombarded since 29th September with 15 and 28-cm. shells. On the 30th the cannonade lasted fifteen hours, yet the little garrison succeeded in stopping the shell-holes. On 1st October the cannonade continued with the same violence, but the redoubt was partially protected by a row of trees which impeded the German observation of the effects of their own fire. On 2nd October the Germans mounted machine guns at the station of Wavre-Ste.-Catherine, about 700 metres from the redoubt; they did not imagine that it was still capable of resistance; but the Duffel 5.7-cm. guns, which were still in working order, fired on the station and forced the enemy to make a rapid retreat.<sup>5</sup>

The Military Governor now gave orders to concentrate the defence on the north bank of the Nèthe,<sup>6</sup> in view of the serious position in the third sector.

The situation being so grave, the Belgian Government found itself obliged to inform the British Government in the course of that after-

<sup>1</sup> For preceding and following passages, see "Notes d'un occupant de fort Waelhem," loc. cit.; "Journal" in *Morning Post*, loc. cit.; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>2</sup> The German great siege guns had a range of at least 15,000 metres; the Belgian of 4,800 metres.

<sup>3</sup> "L'agonie du fort de Lierre," loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Illustrated War News*, part 13, p. 12, for photographs showing the effect of shells on the forts.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 54.



noon of their wish to evacuate the Antwerp stronghold—that is, to withdraw the field army, leaving the defence to the normal garrison troops. As these latter were not qualified to resist the powerful besiegers for long, this meant the abandonment of Antwerp.

This decision was in conformity with the conclusions arrived at in the War Council on 29th September, which contemplated the retreat of the field army on the evening of 2nd October, and the grave events of the day could only confirm it.

Great was the consternation at this news, in British military, naval, and diplomatic spheres. France and Great Britain were at that very moment negotiating with a view to coming to the aid of Antwerp.

Already, on 6th September, Mr. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, had drawn his colleagues' attention to the risk the fortress was running. His warnings appeared premature, although he laid much stress on the intimate interest of the British Admiralty in the fate of Antwerp. He suggested the despatch of a British Territorial Division to stimulate the defence, as well as other measures which we are unable to give in detail.

All this time Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, was in communication with the French Government concerning the proposed relieving army, which was to be composed of contingents of both the guaranteeing Powers. But events moved rapidly, and the Belgian Government's telegram surprised Lord Kitchener and his colleagues before the Anglo-French conversations had attained any definite result.

There was a meeting of the Cabinet, at which the First Lord of the Admiralty was present, on the evening of 2nd October. The members were much depressed by the news of the Belgian Government's decision. They evidently had formed no idea of the desperate circumstances of the defenders of Antwerp in the face of such immensely superior artillery, and they still thought the fortress might be saved if help were sent at once.

As an immediate decision was imperative, Mr. Winston Churchill offered to leave at once for Antwerp, to inform the Belgian Government of the measures being taken to relieve them, to examine the conditions on the spot, and find out the best means of continuing the defence until reinforcements could be sent.<sup>1</sup> This offer was accepted by the Cabinet, and Mr. Churchill left London at once, informing the Belgians of his intention and praying them to suspend preparations for their retreat. Already several officials of the different ministerial departments of the Belgian Government had arrived at Ostend, to install their offices there. On Saturday morning the Ministry itself and the Foreign Legations were to leave, and the French and British residents were to follow in the afternoon. The public, needless to state, knew nothing of these measures. But a proclamation of the Governor, calling their attention to the attitude to be adopted in case the Germans occupied the town, had begun to excite suspicion and raise grave anxiety.

The announcement of Mr. Churchill's sudden arrival temporarily

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Churchill's speech in House of Commons on 15th November 1915 (complete text in *The Times* of the 16th), and his article, *Antwerp: the story of its siege and fall*, in the *Sunday Pictorial* for 19th November 1916.

suspended these preparations for departure. The British Minister at King Albert's Court, even, did not himself know of his Government's decision, for he had already, in the afternoon, begun the destruction of important documents in the quarters of the Legation,<sup>1</sup> Hôtel St.-Antoine.

The night of 2nd October was comparatively tranquil. At six o'clock in the morning of the 3rd the cannonade began again. The 42-cm. guns were aimed carefully at Fort Kessel, and other heavy artillery swept the north bank of the Nèthe and the roads leading from it, in order to prepare for another attempt at forcing the Scheldt by the German infantry. The situation of the Belgians was truly appalling: they had only their field artillery (7.5 cm.'s), and a few 15-cm. howitzers left to meet the German guns.<sup>2</sup> They still had two armoured trains, one on the bank of the Ruppel and one on the Nèthe. These had been constructed at Hoboken, under the directions of the British Lieutenant-Commander Littlejohn. They consisted of four big coal-trucks covered outside with sheet-iron up to a height which sufficiently protected the occupants. Six 12-cm. naval guns had been sent from England: there was time to mount four of them. Between each gun-truck was a truck—also armoured—full of ammunition. A little engine drew the train. The guns were served by Belgian gunners, assisted by British gun-layers, and supported by a small infantry detachment, in case of a German infantry attack.<sup>3</sup> These trains were quite useful on account of their mobility and their big naval guns, but they could do nothing against the monster German siege guns. Still, the Belgians continued the fight with these inadequate means.

On this day, 3rd October, the two last works on the left bank of the Nèthe fell. The *fortin* of Duffel, which the Germans thought they had silenced, had driven the enemy from the Wavre-Ste.-Catherine railway station. Puzzled by this, the Germans now decided to clear up the mystery by a dishonest trick. At half-past eight in the morning a German officer appeared before the fort with a flag of truce; when he was in the immediate neighbourhood of the fort, he examined it through a pair of binoculars and then fled precipitately. The bombardment which followed was no more effective; at ten at night the garrison still held the work. But they had no more ammunition. They signalled this fact to Headquarters and received permission to leave the fort: they crossed the Nèthe and rejoined their comrades on the right bank, taking with them all their wounded. Shortly after they left, the redoubt exploded.<sup>4</sup>

There remained only Fort Kessel. The batteries of howitzers and large mortars concentrated their fire on it, and a battery of guns fired alternately before and in the rear of the fort. Irreparable damage resulted. At seven o'clock in the morning the fire-control was destroyed, a battery rendered useless, and three turret cupolas hit. Half the fort was out of action an hour and a half later. It was evacuated in the course of the day.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell's *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> See the pictures of the armoured trains, from photographs, in *The Illustrated War News*, part 10, pp. 1, 17; also in E. A. Powell's book.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

At the same time, in order to prepare the passage of the Nèthe, the Germans violently bombarded the town of Lierre, forcing what remained of the civilian inhabitants to leave it; the local civic guard was disbanded. The Belgian soldiers then turned to barricading the streets and constructing defences, using largely the furniture of the abandoned houses. The Hospital was cannonaded and some wounded were killed.<sup>1</sup>

Soon the German attacks increased: the artificial line of defence across the Nèthe had been annihilated by the siege artillery; but gun fire was not alone capable of forcing the natural defensive barrier formed by the stream. Infantry attacks were necessary to clear the approaches. Pressure of the enemy developed most markedly on the Antwerp-Lalines road, against the Waelhem railway bridge: not less than three attacks were made here against the defenders of the Nèthe, but artillery fire decimated the assailants, and the attacks failed.<sup>2</sup> In the course of one of these attempts, near Waelhem, the Germans endeavoured to throw a bridge across the Nèthe; they succeeded in making one and advanced in compact masses of infantry to the river bank, in order to effect the crossing. Every available Belgian gun and rifle was aimed at them and concentrated on the threatened spot. A terrible fire swept their ranks and opened dark gaps; but with an intrepidity which won the admiration of the Belgians, the Germans went forward to their death, rank upon rank, like the waves of the sea.

One row had hardly fallen when another took its place. Finally, the improvised bridge fell to pieces under the fire, and as the Belgians continued to sweep the opposite bank, the enemy drew back. Around the ruins of the bridge lay thickly the bodies of the dead and the dying and the wounded, whose groans and cries could be heard above the sounds of battle.<sup>3</sup>

Up till then, the exact position of the Belgian guns had not been ascertained by the besiegers, but in the course of the afternoon, about 3.30, there was a change for the worse. The enemy guns got the range of the batteries with remarkable exactness, and shells fell thick about the guns.

During this day the Higher Command organized the protection of the army's line of march through Northern Flanders. While the Cavalry (de Witte's division), occupied Wetteren, with the object explained above, a second provisional division was formed of divisional Cavalry and cyclist companies, and was sent to Lokeren.

At the end of the day the Belgian Legations in foreign countries received the first official communication issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the beginning of the siege. It ran as follows:—

On the east of the river Senne our defence has been obliged to retire to the Nèthe, after a violent German artillery fire and an obstinate defence of five days. Our positions on the Nèthe are very strong. The army will resist with the utmost energy.

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, 5th October 1914; "Crimes of the German Army" in the *Field*, 14th January 1916; H. Davignon, *La Belgique et l'Allemagne*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Times* correspondent, 8th October 1914.

But important events had occurred in the course of the day (Saturday, 3rd October). About one o'clock the British First Lord of the Admiralty had arrived at Antwerp. He motored at once to the Hôtel St.-Antoine, where he set about reassuring the civil, and especially the communal, authorities regarding the fate of Antwerp. He then discussed the situation with the Belgian Government and the British Staff officers who followed the course of the operations at Antwerp. He then telegraphed what seemed the most practicable suggestion to the British Government.

The position was peculiarly difficult. Mr. Churchill had to avoid engaging his colleagues in any undertaking which, after having stimulated the Belgians to renewed resistance, could not be carried to an end. He proposed that the Belgians should continue the defence as far as possible, and the French and British Governments were to promise to inform them within three days if they could send a relieving army, and, if so, in what strength. If it were impossible to send a relieving army, the British Government, in any case, would send troops to Ghent and other positions on the Belgian line of retreat in sufficient force thoroughly to protect and cover this retreat. Thus the Belgian army would not be fatally involved through having continued the resistance to the German attack on the lines of Antwerp. The defence was to be assisted further by the despatch of naval guns and naval brigades, and by such other measures as might enable the Antwerp garrison to hold out for the stipulated three days.

These proposals were accepted by the British and Belgian Governments. Mr. Churchill was at once informed by telegraph from London that an expedition should be sent, and particulars of its numerical force and composition were added for the information of the Belgian Government.<sup>2</sup>

The first British auxiliary troops arrived on the Saturday night (3rd October). They consisted of a brigade of Marine Light Infantry 2,200 strong—well drilled, well armed troops, with several heavy guns. They had come by special train from Ostend. They were at once sent to the Nèthe front to relieve the exhausted men of the Belgian 1st mixed brigade in the northern outskirts of the Lièrre urban district. With them remained the men of the 7th Belgian Line Regiment.<sup>4</sup>

The news of the arrival of the English roused the greatest enthusiasm among the populace and stiffened the defenders, who had begun to be out of heart. Now they thought themselves invincible. The traditional reputation of the might of Britain guaranteed the future. The Belgians could not imagine that Britain would undertake an enterprise without carrying it out successfully.

<sup>1</sup> See the particularly graphic account of Mr. Churchill's mission in E. A. Powell's *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 181-3.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. Churchill's House of Commons speech on 15th November 1915 (full text in *The Times* of the 16th), and his article *Antwerp*, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> They arrived on Saturday night, not Sunday night, as both E. A. Powell (op. cit. p. 185) and J. Buchan (op. cit. vol. iii. p. 185) erroneously state. See the official report of General Paris, their commander, to the Admiralty (text in *The Times* of 5th December 1914). The report says: "The brigade . . . reached Antwerp during the night 3rd-4th October."

<sup>4</sup> Report of General Paris to the Admiralty, loc. cit.; E. A. Powell, op. cit. p. 185; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 97.

The arrival of the British troops also electrified the Belgian soldiers. Once more, as in the glorious days of August, they were heard singing as they marched to battle.<sup>1</sup> At last "the English had come!" They were not left alone to face the hordes of Germany, and they dreamed that these first reinforcements were but the vanguard of a mighty army from which they expected wonders. The excellent impression produced by Mr. Churchill's action was undeniable.

Sunday, 4th October, was a breathing space along most of the front. During the night the bombardment had ceased; there were no engagements of importance in the morning. At rare intervals only the guns boomed in the direction of Willebroeck and Duffel. After the middle of the day firing recommenced more actively on both sides. The Germans used a great deal of shrapnel, and at rare intervals fired their big guns. It became evident that they had changed the position of their artillery, and were moving it gradually towards the Nèthe. On both sides the fire was directed from captive balloons. The Belgian armoured train tried to force the German balloon to descend, but had no luck, and was itself the object of a violent cannonade.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile the Germans methodically swept the south bank of the Nèthe clear of defenders. In spite of the fall of the permanent works there, the Belgians still clung desperately to the trenches and defensive works lying to the south between the Big Nèthe and the Little Nèthe, and along the river itself. The enemy's shells fell mercilessly on the trenches which were still occupied, and finally forced the Belgians to cross the stream: thus the principal line of defence on the third sector was entirely lost.<sup>3</sup>

Then the Germans prepared the way for their crossing of the Nèthe by a very lively fire on the banks, concentrating their efforts principally on the Belgian trenches and the principal crossings of the stream. They simultaneously rained shrapnel on the terrain lying just in the rear of these trenches, in order to cut off possible reinforcements. Some shrapnel burst above Contich, and drove the women along the streets in terror. The populace rushed out of Linth, Duffel, Lierre, Grove, and even Vieux-Dieu, along the routes to Antwerp, while the German guns continually sent projectiles in their direction. On this occasion, however, the shells burst high, and caused less damage than they might.<sup>4</sup>

It was not so in the region by the Nèthe, where towards evening Lierre and the Waelhem-Contich road were specially bombarded. The wonderful accuracy of the German fire astounded the Belgians, who could only attribute it to the presence and help of spies<sup>5</sup> who were signalling their positions to the enemy from within the lines of defence. The troops in the trenches nearest the river were particularly exposed to the torrent of shrapnel, which burst over them or in their immediate neighbourhood. As no enemy was visible, they were unable to use their rifles in reply, and had to await death without striking a blow.

<sup>1</sup> This is stated by *The Times* correspondent (*The Times*, 12th October 1914).

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 12th October 1914.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> *The Times* correspondent (*The Times*, 8th October 1914).

<sup>5</sup> On spies and spying during the siege of Antwerp see *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 105.

On the fourth sector the Germans had given up attacking at close quarters, and kept at a distance of 7 or 8 kilometres from the objective of their fire. They evidently had not such heavy guns at their disposal on this sector as on the third.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, on the lines of communication towards Termonde the day was more eventful than on the other fronts. The Germans cannonaded the Scheldt dyke to the north of Termonde. Their infantry extended to the west and appeared at Schoonaerde, where they attempted to cross the river. These efforts spent themselves in vain against the resolute defence of the left bank. The Belgians knew that they must hold on here to the end in order to keep their comrades' line of retreat safe, and they devoted themselves to their duty with sublime courage and tenacity.<sup>2</sup>

On Monday, 5th October, and the next day the rest of the English reinforcements arrived in Antwerp from the coast. There were two naval brigades, 6,000 men in all, officered by members of the Royal Naval Reserve, the Royal Fleet Reserve, and the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and the brigades themselves had been formed in the third week of August. They were not recruited up to full strength at the moment of their despatch to Antwerp. Most of the men had had no military experience, and some of them had just quitted civilian life and hardly knew how to use a rifle. They were very incompletely equipped. Some of them were still without their ammunition pouches, their great-coat and water-bottles. Some were obliged to slip their bayonets into their belts or tie them on with cord.<sup>3</sup> Each naval brigade was formed of four battalions, each named after famous English admirals. The 1st Brigade comprised the Drake, Benbow, Hawke, and Collingwood battalions; the 2nd, the Nelson, Howe, Hood, and Anson. General Paris, of the Marine Light Infantry, was in command, and was himself under the orders of General De Guise, the Military Governor of Antwerp. Ammunition and supplies arrived in London motor-buses. When the people of Antwerp saw these vehicles passing through their streets and beheld the English troops stepping briskly forward to the sound of the famous

It's a long way to Tipperary,

there was a scene of frantic joy. The crowd burst into cheers; cries were heard, "Long live the English!" "Hurrah for Tommy Atkins!" The spectators did not at all appreciate the difference between these raw volunteer recruits and the seasoned regulars of the Marine Light Infantry, who had arrived on the Saturday before. All was well; the English had come; they were no longer alone. . . .

As they arrived the British troops were sent on to the front throughout the course of Monday and Tuesday.

The terrible bombardment of the banks of the Nèthe, and especially of Lierre, which had begun on Sunday afternoon, increased in violence during the night and early on Monday morning.<sup>5</sup> It was the prelude

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97. There is a photograph of the fighting at this point in *The Illustrated War News*, part 14, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Report of General Paris, quoted above; E. A. Powell, *op. cit.* pp. 185, 187-8; J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. iii. p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> General Paris's Report.

to an infantry attack. On Monday morning the Belgian outposts were everywhere driven back, and the enemy rushed forward to carry the Nèthe crossing. The principal pressure was between Lierre and Duffel. The German onslaught was supported by a terrific artillery fire, which rendered the Belgian positions untenable, so that at a certain moment the trenches in the immediate vicinity of the river had to be evacuated. The Belgians fell back half a mile and took up their positions in better constructed shelters.<sup>1</sup>

Three German regiments crossed the Nèthe at Lierre, and attacked the defences north of that town, which were occupied by the British marines. The marines defended themselves with vigour and prevented the enemy from debouching from the town; they suffered considerably themselves from shrapnel fire in their wide and open trenches.<sup>2</sup>

Below Lierre, under cover of a powerful artillery fire, the Germans succeeded in gaining a footing on the northern bank of the Nèthe at points which were not under the Belgian fire, and occupied a portion of the surrounding terrain. Many counter-attacks were made by the Belgians in the hope of driving back the enemy into the stream, but they only succeeded in checking his progress on the north bank. The Germans clung desperately to the points at which they had crossed the river.<sup>3</sup> Presently they attempted to throw bridges across at these points, but the Belgian guns destroyed them as fast as they were built. The enemy therefore could not transport any considerable bodies of troops across the Nèthe.

Moreover, the 1st Army Division repulsed several fierce attacks between Duffel and Waelhem, to the right of the operations described above.<sup>4</sup>

Towards noon the troops of the 7th Line Regiment, which occupied the trenches to the right of the Marine Light Infantry at Lierre, were obliged to fall back, and thus left the right flank of the British exposed. For a time the situation was critical. Towards the close of the afternoon a vigorous counter-attack, bravely led by Colonel Tiéchon, of the 2nd Chasseurs, and assisted by the British airmen, retrieved the position.<sup>5</sup>

As a prompt retreat now seemed imminent, the 1st British Naval Brigade prepared in the course of the afternoon to support it.<sup>6</sup> An uninterrupted cannonade rained upon the Belgian bank of the Nèthe. Some projectiles fell upon Contich and Bouchout at 6 kilometres distance north of the stream.<sup>7</sup> While the Germans were thus gaining a foothold on the third sector, the Belgians executed an offensive movement on the fourth. The troops of the 6th Division left their defensive positions and directed an attack against the besiegers' lines. The battalion of grenadiers reached Saint-Amand, passed through the village, and tried to emerge from it. But they met with superior enemy forces, and had to fall back to their original lines, fighting all the time.

The Germans were far from idle. They bombarded the outskirts

<sup>1</sup> General Paris's Report; *Times* correspondent in *The Times* of 8th October 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 97; accounts given by the British marines on their return to Dover, published in the *Daily Telegraph* of 13th October 1914.

<sup>3</sup> Report of General Paris; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 97.      <sup>5</sup> Report of General Paris.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 97.

of Termonde with their heavy artillery. Further west they again attempted the passage of the Scheldt at Schoonaerde. There was a sharp artillery duel, after which the German infantry marched to the attack. But the detachment of the 4th Division guarding the approaches of the river drove them back, thanks to the support of the artillery and the cavalry division, which had left Wetteren at the news of the engagement, and arrived in time to fall upon the enemy in the rear and entirely frustrate their movement.<sup>1</sup> It was none the less true for that that the position of the 4th Division had become critical owing to the increasingly strong German pressure in that region. For how much longer could the division still hold the masses of the enemy and prevent their obtaining a foothold on the north bank of the Scheldt?

On the third sector the impending arrival of the two British naval brigades left a faint hope of continuing to hold the enemy's advance north of the Nèthe between Duffel and Lierre. All available forces were gathered together for a desperate counter-attack. A regiment of carabinieri, some of the 21st of the Line Regiment, two regiments of chasseurs of the 5th Division—or rather what still remained of these decimated units: with these forces it was resolved to attempt a surprise attack on the enemy, and to drive him back on the Nèthe during the dark night between the 5th and 6th October. It was decided to fall upon the Germans with the bayonet, and the express order was given not to load the rifles.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The order was given, "Conquer or die!" Silently the columns slipped into the night. When the dark line of the enemy's trenches loomed up the Belgians rushed forward with fixed bayonets. Already from the German trenches came rifle fire, which crowned their parapets with will-of-the-wisps of flame, but the charge swept on. Then suddenly came cries, "English! friends! English! friends!" and arms waved wildly in the gloom. What! by some incomprehensible fatality were the Belgians about to attack the British soldiers who had come that very day? The Belgians stopped, anxious and confused; their ranks became loosened. But suddenly voices thundered, "Forward! They are Boches!" Unhappily the dishonest ruse had broken the élan of the charge. From the enemy's entrenchments came a furious fusillade at short range, and the monotonous shrill sound of machine-gun fire. The Belgian officers rallied their men and led them bravely; some groups of soldiers sprang forward, and there were terrible hand-to-hand struggles in the gloom. The men used both bayonets and rifle-butts in wild confusion. The right column reached the Nèthe and by a superhuman effort forced back the enemy to the stream. The left column, operating near Lierre, became entangled in the floods caused by a rupture of the dyke. They lost their way, plunging through the water, whilst the machine guns swept their ranks and bodies fell heavily into the mud and slime. Others struck the Boomlaar woods, which were already occupied by the Germans. The 21st Line Regiment and the British marines reached the outskirts of the wood, but found it impossible to maintain their position. From the depths of the wood the German machine guns spat death and destruction.

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 97-8.



At break of day the battle was over. A fierce German cannonade was directed against the counter-attack and mowed the men down. Those who escaped had to fall back on the line Pullaer-Lachenen, to the north-west of Lierre. It was the last flicker of the defensive.<sup>1</sup>

The British marines had repulsed the enemy's efforts to advance in pursuit of the fleeing Belgians with their habitual stoicism and sangroid. But they finally found their position untenable. They stuck to their trenches till the last minute, facing Lierre. Then, under an infernal fire, they began an orderly retreat.

At four o'clock in the morning of 6th October the Germans established themselves in force along the north bank of the Nèthe, between Duffel and Lierre. At six about 2,000 men had crossed, and begun to prepare the way for their comrades. Two footbridges were set up between Duffel and Lierre, five more at Lierre itself. A full bridge-building equipment was brought to Duffel, and large bodies of troops assembled. Several bodies of troops advanced to the attack and many infantry sections crossed the river. The mass of German troops grew from one quarter of an hour to another.<sup>2</sup> They were soon numerous enough on the north of the Nèthe to launch a general attack on the line formed by the 1st, 2nd, and 5th Belgian Divisions, supported by the reserve battalions of the 3rd and 6th Divisions and the British marines. All counter-attacks failed against the torrent of invaders. Nevertheless, at four in the afternoon the 14th Line Regiment still occupied the Duffel railway bridge, although the German infantry had crossed further up the stream.

The resistance of the Antwerp fortress was seriously compromised. The Belgians were compelled to retire on their second line of defence, protected by the guns of the inner circle of forts.<sup>3</sup> The British marines took up an intermediate position which had been hastily constructed for them.<sup>4</sup> The heavy British guns mounted in Forts 3 and 4 soon blended their deep notes with the din of battle. The Germans had brought their artillery nearer, and their shells began to fall at Hove and Vieux-Dieu.<sup>5</sup>

During the day, while the torrent of Germans was pouring across the Nèthe, the breach already existing in the line of the outer fortifications was widened by the fall of Fort Broechem. The German heavy guns had attacked it; at half past ten o'clock part of the fort was in ruins, and the garrison were endeavouring to save their comrades immured in the ruined galleries. Six hours later all the vaults had been smashed in and the cupolas were inaccessible. At 5 p.m. the fort was no longer in existence. A breach of 20 kilometres had now been made in the first line of defence.<sup>6</sup>

It appeared impossible to fight on under these conditions. Most of the Belgian troops had been on duty six nights, since 29th September. They were dropping with fatigue and overcome with sleep.

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes des 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'armée*, loc. cit.; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *Times* correspondent (*Times* of 8th October 1914); *La campagne de l'armée belge*, 99.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 56; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> General Paris's Report.

<sup>5</sup> Account by the *Times* correspondent, 12th October 1914.

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 100.

The retreat was inevitable and must be rapidly carried out. The lines of retreat through Flanders were increasingly menaced. The Germans during the day had renewed their attempt to force the passage of the Scheldt at Termonde and Schoonaerde. They not only bombarded Fort Breendonck on the fourth sector, but swept the north bank of the Scheldt near Termonde three times with powerful artillery fire. At Baesrode, further down the stream, they prepared anew to cross.

Before Schoonaerde the Germans tried to cross the Scheldt on the morning of the 6th. They enfiladed the Belgian battery which defended this point. The 13th Line Regiment, in occupation of the dyke, had to evacuate its position. But at the moment when the enemy were about to profit by this, a body of cavalry attacked them vigorously in the rear. It was the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, which at the news of the engagement had left Wetteren in haste, to repeat their successful surprise of the day before. They had some guns with them, and these were at once got into position and began to fire on the buildings of the tar factory at Schoonaerde, where the Germans had taken up their position. The Belgian shells set fire to the tar factory, and the enemy abandoned it and fled in disorder. One of their batteries disappeared at full gallop, leaving even its ammunition chests behind. This fortunate cavalry and artillery intervention permitted the 13th Line Regiment to reoccupy the trenches on the dyke.

Meanwhile the commandant of the 4th Division signalled that the situation on that front was growing worse. As communication must be kept open to the westwards at all costs, the 6th Division received at ten o'clock the order to cross the Scheldt at Tamise, to come to the aid of the defenders of Termonde, Schoonaerde, and Baesrode.<sup>1</sup> And the Belgian Higher Command faced another danger besides the possible cutting of the lines of retreat through Flanders. For it was evident that if the field army was to evacuate Antwerp, it must at all costs carry out its junction with the Allies; failing which it would be rolled up in the western corner of West Flanders and driven back on the sea: that is, driven to capitulate and surrender in a body.

Where were the Allies then, at that moment?

Since the victory of the Marne had forced the Germans to retire to the Aisne, the two armies facing one another had ceaselessly manoeuvred with a view to outflanking each other on the west, and had moved their forces steadily north-westward. At the beginning of October the German right wing had reached the neighbourhood of Lille. If the German front continued to extend itself towards the north and the sea, the Belgian army would run the risk of being cut off from the Franco-British forces. To reach Nieupoort the German right had only to cover 60 kilometres. From the Nèthe to Nieupoort the Belgians would have to cover 140 kilometres.

To the danger of being cut off by the besieging army forcing the passage of the Scheldt near Termonde was now added the peril of being cut off by the right wing of the German forces in France. The field army—in accordance with the suggestion of the British Government—was to be kept in Antwerp, it was urgently necessary to

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 56.

occupy the lines of retreat further to the west. It was necessary to occupy Ghent in force: this town was equidistant from Lille and from the Nèthe, and formed the centre of communications with the Allies. Up till this moment it had not been possible to devote any regular troops to the protection of Ghent, which was in charge of some of the civic guard of Ghent, Liège, and Brussels, supported by a squadron of gendarmes. There were certainly four battalions of volunteers, but their training was not yet complete and they were counted as reserves. Under these circumstances, the Belgian High Command, relying on Mr. Churchill's promise that British troops should occupy Ghent, as mentioned above, insisted—on the 4th October—on the urgent need for these reinforcements to be sent. The British Government promised the arrival of the 7th British Division within as short a time as possible, and it was stated that French troops also were to take part in this movement.

On the night of 6th October the last military trains were to start from Antwerp for Ostend, carrying the base of supplies and commissariat. The retreat was still possible, but it was necessary to carry it out at once. So the King ordered the field army to cross to the left bank of the Scheldt on the night between 6th and 7th October. The troops were to use the Tamise, Hoboken, and Burght bridges, and once upon the left bank were to pursue their way westwards. There could no longer be any question of occupying the line of the Dendre, and there awaiting the Allies. This possibility, which had been considered at the conference of 29th September, had been destroyed since then by the rapid march of events and the continued defence of the Antwerp lines.

The bulk of the field army having left, Antwerp was to be defended by the garrison of the fortress, some 30,000 men (garrison troops), the 2nd Army Division and the three British brigades.

The retreat of the field army began at midnight. The 1st and 5th Divisions broke off the combat and crossed to the left bank of the Scheldt by the bridges near Antwerp wharves. The 3rd Division crossed the river higher up.<sup>1</sup>

We shall return, later on, to the incidents of this retreat; let us now see what happened at Antwerp after the evening of 6th October.

In the night of the 6th the Belgian and British troops destined to carry on the defence withdrew unpursued by the enemy, and occupied the intervals between the forts of the inner circle. These entrenchments had been strongly organized.<sup>2</sup>

On the preceding day, however, the Germans had begun to bring their artillery north of the Nèthe, and had already begun to bombard the inner forts on the evening of the 6th. This bombardment continued during the 7th, and was first directed against Fort No. 1.<sup>3</sup>

But on the same day, at dawn, the Government and the diplomatic representatives of the Allied nations secretly quitted Antwerp by the steamer *Amsterdam* and sailed for Ostend. Since the night of the 6th the ship had been ready to leave. The State archives, some precious pictures and works of art and the personal luggage of the personnel of the Government had been taken on board. The Ministers

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 59-61; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>2</sup> Report by General Paris.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 62.

and Diplomatic Corps reached Ostend in the afternoon. At the same time Mr. Winston Churchill, who had remained in Antwerp since the 3rd of the month, also left. He had visited the Belgian positions and exposed himself on more than one occasion in the firing-line. Near Waelhem he narrowly escaped a shrapnel wound.

While the *Amsterdam* transported the Belgian Ministers towards Ostend, the British First Lord of the Admiralty left by motor, and took the route for the coast, protected by an armoured car. Before leaving he gave orders for the destruction of the engines of the big German boats in the harbour.<sup>1</sup> A section of engineers carried out this task, and blew up several vessels with charges of dynamite, so that the Germans should not be able to make use of them.

When they awoke on Wednesday morning, the inhabitants of Antwerp learnt to their dismay that the Belgian Government had left for Ostend. Later in the day they found the town placarded with notices signed by the Military Governor announcing that the cannonade of the city was pending, urging those who were able to leave it to do so at once, and recommending those who remained to take refuge in their cellars. And, indeed, in the afternoon, Lieutenant-Colonel Sorela, Spanish military attaché to the German Headquarters, bearing a flag of truce had presented himself, and at the refusal of the Military Governor to surrender the fortress had announced that the Germans would bombard the city. The positions to the north of the Nèthe which the defenders had been forced to abandon were now occupied by the German batteries, ready to send their incendiary bombs upon Antwerp and on the trenches and forts of the second line of defence.

The populace, taken completely by surprise by this threatening announcement, passed suddenly from confidence or phlegmatic indifference to a state of mad panic. Doubtless some inhabitants had already left, but their number was small indeed compared to the exodus which now ensued.

Three routes only remained for the crowds which filled the Antwerp streets in the morning and throughout the day of 7th October—to proceed by the westerly route, through St.-Nicolas and Lokeren in the direction of Ghent (which was that taken by the retreating field army), the northerly route into Holland, and finally the Scheldt, which also led into Holland by Flushing. Eye-witnesses rate the number of fugitives, including not only the population of Antwerp but also of the neighbouring districts, at about five hundred thousand. The greater number rushed to the quays and tried to escape by the Scheldt.<sup>2</sup> Anything and everything that could float was seized and requisitioned: merchant steamers, dredgers, passenger boats, lighters, tugs, fishing-boats, yachts, yawls, and cutters, etc. There was no possibility of organizing a regular service; the human torrent descended through the streets leading to the Scheldt, carrying on its eddies groups of belated soldiers who were going to join the retreating field army. All available boats were rushed and carried by assault, to the cries of women and children crushed and kicked in the struggle. On board the boats the bridges, the cabins, and every hole and corner was crowded with people herded close together, with only one thought—to escape from the doomed town. Many had not thought of bringing the most

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

necessary things with them, or had lost their baggage in the panic; they passed the cold October night on the decks of the ships or in open fishing boats, their teeth chattering with chill and fright, while the guns boomed in the distance. This flood of people lasted for several days and gave to the Scheldt an appearance which those who beheld it will never forget. It was as though the ancient migrations of peoples had recurred; but those were times when whole nations of conquerors launched themselves upon the world seeking their fortunes, while this migration was a miserable tableau of suffering, a procession of exiles, borne towards the Unknown.

Along the land routes the scenes were even worse. Here fugitives and soldiers in retreat marched on in inextricable confusion. On Wednesday afternoon the great road from the Tête de Flandre to Ghent was covered for a distance of forty leagues with a solid mass of fugitives, and the same was the case on every road, every track and footpath leading northwards or westwards. People fled in motors, in carriages, in carts, in furniture wagons, and every sort of vehicle, on horseback, on bicycles, and thousands on thousands fled on foot. There were to be seen men pushing before them wheelbarrows loaded to an incredible weight with their belongings and with their children perched on top in swarms. Young peasants led their old parents, leaning on their arms. Ladies wrapped in furs tripped along in high-heeled shoes, holding on to the lorries or wagons in front of them. Old people clung wildly to the bridles of horses and were half dragged along; while the riders themselves, exhausted by sleepless nights of ceaseless tension, slept in their saddles. Carts, meant originally to carry the products of the harvest, passed full of pale, wounded soldiers and leaving bloodstains on the road behind them. One very old priest was wheeled along in a bath-chair by two young ecclesiastics. Young women with child, about to be confined, were led along gently by their anxious and careful husbands. Among all these refugees were soldiers, some wounded, others broken with fatigue and half asleep, hardly able to drag their feet over the ill-paved roads. Some had taken off their boots and hung them on to their rifle-butts. Others had tied them to their water-bottles or their haversacks and dragged themselves along painfully, their feet shuffling in loose slippers or wrapped in bandages. Then there were groups of monks and whitefaced nuns leading their piteous little flocks of orphans or deaf mutes. The noise and confusion were unimaginable: wheels grinding the pavement, motors snorting, horses galloping, whips cracking; the oaths of the drivers, the moans of the wounded, the wailing of women, the shrill weeping of children, and the monotonous tramp, tramp of thousands of feet. The fields and ditches bordering the bed of this human torrent were sprinkled with the dark forms of fugitives who had fallen owing to exhaustion and could go no further. Most of these poor wretches were tortured by hunger. Farms and villages along the route were cleared of their stock of food at once. Fugitives offered their most precious possessions in exchange for food, or milk for their infants and stimulants for swooning women. In most cases the farmers and peasants could only shake their heads and explain that their provisions had disappeared. Fashionable women, old men,

\* E. A. Powell, op. cit., pp. 194-5. See the photographs published in *The Illustrated War News*, part 10, pp. 5, 20-21.

children, and wounded soldiers wandered through the fields and gnawed turnips, as nothing else was available. Pregnant women fell by the roadside and brought forth their children there without help or attendance.<sup>1</sup> Those who were present at these scenes of anguish are never tired of repeating that they can never forget them and were haunted by them for long afterwards.

The same scenes were enacted along the roads leading towards Holland. In the course of the 7th, thirty thousand refugees arrived at Roosendaal, whose own inhabitants number only ten thousand. The Dutch army authorities sent twelve hundred soldiers to the frontier in charge of food for the refugees. The sight of these victims, who arrived by the thousand in the most wretched state, stirred a deep pity in the hearts of the Dutch people, who did their best to distribute help and find quarters for the fugitives.

When the bulk of the inhabitants had followed the Military Governor's advice and had escaped by those ways which were still open to them, an uncanny silence fell on Antwerp. The *Times* correspondent compares it to the impression produced by an English country town on Sunday. Most of the shops were shut and the pavements almost empty. Only some groups of soldiers hastening towards the bridges over the Scheldt made the streets re-echo to their tread. The post and telegraph offices were at a standstill, and all Government offices were closed.

In the Zoological Gardens the attendants shot down the lions and other most dangerous wild animals, in order to forestall the risk of the possible destruction of the cages during the bombardment, and the consequent escape of the carnivora, whose strength would be increased tenfold by terror and excitement.

Some fugitives still passed through the empty streets; they were those prudent folks who had not been overwhelmed with panic, and had taken the precaution of packing their valuables in valises and boxes, which they now dragged with difficulty themselves along the streets, vainly looking for porters.<sup>2</sup>

At three o'clock the King left Antwerp, to accompany his army in retreat. He was to take up his quarters at St.-Nicolas, Selzaete, and Ercloo successively.<sup>3</sup>

The people remaining in Antwerp could still hear the guns of the forts replying furiously to the German attacks.

The fire of the British naval guns mounted in Forts 3 and 4 could be distinguished from the rest by their more staccato note and longer reverberation. The Belgians had only light artillery or old out-of-date guns with which to reply when the Germans sprinkled the enceinte with their fire.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth recording that at this moment the outer forts of the fourth sector had not yet fallen; those of Breendonck and Liezele were still holding their assailants in check.<sup>5</sup>

The situation of the troops in occupation of Forts 1 to 8 and the trenches of the intervals between these forts may be imagined

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell, op. cit. pp. 195-8.

<sup>2</sup> Account by the *Times* correspondent (*The Times*, 9th October 1914).

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

y the help of the following extract from a British officer's diary:—

October 7th.—Just a short note of my doings. Had no sleep except in short dozes since I left —. Last night we marched for about two and a half hours to the trenches. My hat! it was cold. Shells making things pleasant on top. Pushed off again about 3.30 a.m. and marched back again in the dark for about three hours. Improved some trenches with sand-bags, barbed wire on the back of the town, and wrote this huddled up in a bomb shelter. Shrapnel up aloft. Went to a house close by and got a blanket and coffee. Tinned beef, biscuits, and water seem our staple diet, though we get wine and fruit given us by Belgian troops. What we are waiting for is artillery. The guns we have won't reach, so our people have to stay in the trenches and get shot. I haven't seen a German yet.

Simply loaded up with ammunition, etc. My shoulders absolutely ache. Haven't taken my clothes off yet. I seem to have been here weeks. The cold was horrible last night. Could not get to sleep, with a trench half full of water.<sup>1</sup>

A marine said that shells whistled around him and his comrades throughout Wednesday and Thursday.

Taubes circled above them spying out all possible secrets.<sup>2</sup>

While the troops in the intervening entrenchments were thus exposed to an unceasing cannonade, and the little Belgian guns continued barking furiously within the forts, very serious events were taking place to the west, on the banks of the Scheldt, at Termonde and Schoonaerde. The German corps had vigorously renewed their attempts at forcing the passage of the Scheldt. During the whole morning heavy guns, machine guns, and rifles had raised an infernal tumult along a considerable front.

In the afternoon, in spite of the lively resistance of the 4th and 6th Division troops, the Germans succeeded in crossing the river at Termonde, Schoonaerde, and Wetteren. At Termonde and Wetteren only scanty detachments crossed, but at Schoonaerde they came over in force. The combat was keen on both sides, and the losses heavy. The Germans had to force the crossing under the fire from the Belgian entrenchments, and the machine guns swept the German companies uninterruptedly. No sooner had the Germans reached the northern bank than they rapidly formed up and advanced. But at Grembergen, north of Termonde, they were held up. The 1st Carabinier Regiment offered an obstinate resistance at Berlaer, and checked the enemy's push.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile some German troops were concentrating round Alost. Presently a German detachment, composed of three regiments of Bavarian light horse, of one infantry regiment and several batteries, was signalled at Cruyshautem. The vanguard reached as far as Nazareth, 12 kilometres from Ghent (about 10 miles), where an action developed.<sup>4</sup>

It became evident that the Belgian field army had not begun the retreat a minute too soon, and fear for its safety was far from being dissipated.

<sup>1</sup> Published in *The Times*, 16th October 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 13th October 1914.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 108; account by the *Times* correspondent, 9th October 1914.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 61; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 103.

Still the 2nd Division, the garrison troops, and the British contingents continued to hold the Antwerp second line of defence.

At night on 7th October the bombardment of Antwerp began. On this first night the Germans did not use their largest guns. They fired shells of ordinary dimensions, shrapnel, and incendiary bombs, on the city. Three days before the bombardment Mr. Diedrich, Consul-General for the United States of America, had begged his Government to cable to Berlin to entreat that in the event of a bombardment certain buildings—for instance, the cathedral, the hospitals, and some historic houses—should not be aimed at. He also pointed out the exact position of the American Consulate.<sup>1</sup> Was this request forwarded on? We do not know. But it is in any case certain that the Germans did not in the least spare the hospitals, for one of the first bombs fell upon the British ambulance. Others set fire to the neighbourhood of the cathedral, and the Palais de Justice was hit more than once.

Hardly had the cannonade started when thousands of shells, mostly incendiary, beat upon the city, whistling through the air with a sinister sound. Crouching in their cellars, the inhabitants heard with terror the rush of projectiles above their dwellings, the burst of the explosions, and the long rumble of falling roofs and walls. The ventilators of the cellars had been blocked up with sand-bags, straw, and heaps of rubbish, as a protection from the effects of the explosions, and the air within, not being able to circulate, soon became unbreathable. As the waterworks had been destroyed, it was only possible to fetch water with great difficulty to the scenes of fires, or to look on helplessly at the raging of the flames. A cloud of ashes and a reek of petroleum hung over the town. The Belgians had set fire to the petroleum tanks at Hoboken to prevent their utilization by the enemy, and now this highly inflammable substance burned furiously, flinging into the air enormous columns of black smoke, which took on a sinister ruddy hue from the fires burning below.

After an hour's bombardment, the Zurenborg quarter, the gas-works, Berchem, and the south quarter, were full of fires. Presently houses fell in on the Chaussée de Malines, and flames burst out. The streets were full of broken window-panes, bricks, stucco, and ashes; many people had provided buckets of water on all the stories of their dwellings in order to put out fires. All through the night the populace listened in their cellars to the sharp whistle of the projectiles and the deep rumbling which was like the sound of an earthquake.

Almost everywhere tragic events occurred. When the bombardment was at its worst, the prisoners in the common gaol banged furiously at the doors of their cells and yelled like madmen. They had to be released; the most dangerous criminals had, of course, been safely incarcerated. In the British Red Cross Hospital, which had its quarters in the Chaussée de Malines, directly in the firing-line, there were about one hundred and thirty wounded men. The first shell fell in the garden, making a hole 6 feet across and 4 feet deep. At once the wounded were taken down to the cellars. They were terrified, and all those who could walk entreated the doctors and nurses to let them leave the building. Sixty of them went away,

<sup>1</sup> According to G. Lynch, in the *Observer* of 11th October 1914.



dragging themselves through the streets, whose darkness was lit up by the flare of the bursting shells. Those who remained in the hospital spent the night in the cellars, stretched on mattresses and crowded against one another. Nurses and doctors kept their heads and worked calmly under the directions of a woman doctor—Dr. Florence Stoney. All night long incendiary bombs came at intervals of ten minutes, and fell with a terrible noise.

In the morning a house fronting the hospital had been demolished, a building at the foot of the garden was blazing, and another building near by had just caught fire. At this spectacle several of the wounded insisted on leaving. A motor-car was finally procured, and took the most helpless wounded patients to another less exposed hospital. As the provisions promised by the Red Cross authorities had not come, and the central office of the society was empty, the sixteen worst cases were placed in a motor-lorry which was accidentally discovered and were taken to Ostend. The hospital staff left on the morning of the 8th October, and succeeded in crossing the Scheldt in motors which they had met with on the way; these motors were engaged in taking ammunition to places which were more sheltered against the bombardment. There were now over a score of fires scattered throughout the area of the city.<sup>1</sup>

On the morning of the 8th, at about ten o'clock, the bombardment died down for a time, and some groups of people profited by this circumstance to go down to the wharves, where there were enormous stacks of provisions which had been removed from the German boats interned at the outbreak of the war. The least reputable element of the populace seized the chance and set about looting them systematically.<sup>2</sup>

During the respite from the cannonade new masses of inhabitants also rushed for the northern and western main roads.

The *Times* correspondent, who took the route to Holland, was present at a repetition of the scenes of the day before. He passed by one woman stretched out in a wheelbarrow and suffering from the infectious stage of scarlet fever. Another woman was delivered of a child by the roadside; old men and women were carried along by members of their families, who broke down under their weight, owing to their extreme youth or weak physical condition. A crowd reckoned at one hundred and fifty thousand persons blocked the access to the passenger boats for the country station of Waes.<sup>3</sup>

The city streets presented a strange spectacle. All the windows were barricaded and in many places the ground was strewn with shell splinters. About noon isolated individuals, who looked more like ghosts, glided along under the shadow of the houses, dodging the shells which had begun to fall again.

Up till now, at any rate, it appeared that the bombardment had been aimed at all the quarters of the town at hazard, not concentrated on one particular point. It gave the impression of being meant to terrorize rather than to destroy. Up till Thursday night no important

<sup>1</sup> See the article "Woman Doctor's Story of the Bombardment," in the *Observer*, 11th October 1914.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 207-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Times* correspondent, 11th October 1914.

damage had been inflicted, although some bombs had struck the Palais de Justice, the National Bank, and the Central Railway Station, and though many private houses had been set on fire.<sup>1</sup>

All through the course of Thursday the Scheldt was covered with craft of all kinds and sizes, bearing crowds of fugitives towards Flushing. Miracles of desperate energy were performed in order to reach the quays and board one of these boats. A woman was seen to come down to the wharf who had had one leg amputated; in the panic she had lost her crutches, and dragged herself along on one knee, supporting herself on the other side with a petroleum can. She took three hours to reach the place of embarkation! While people crowded on to the quays, shells rushed whistling through the air and fell sometimes in the neighbourhood with a thunderous crash.

During the afternoon some parties of the civic guard and some Anglo-Belgian detachments were busy with the destruction of everything that might be of use to the enemy. They cut the gas-pipes and the electric currents, fired the stores of grain and the food repositories, sunk tenders to block up the mouth of the docks, blew up ships and locks, and broke down bridges.

As night fell, the scene became appalling. The flaming houses lit up the cathedral, throwing up every detail of the lovely Gothic structure in bold relief. The pillar of flames still shot up over two hundred feet above the burning oil-tanks at Hoboken, and above it twisted a dense cloud of smoke as black as ink, which spread above the surrounding country. The blazing petroleum had flowed forth, and some had reached the Scheldt and floated in an incandescent film on the surface of the water. Occasionally bombs fell into the river and hurled pillars of water into the air. Others burst on the wharves, near the bridges at Burcht and elsewhere, and lit up the long line of vehicles which hastened painfully towards the opposite bank.

On Thursday evening there were only a few hundred people left in Antwerp, which appeared as deserted as a cemetery.

As to military operations during 8th October: the 3rd German Reserve Army Corps, reinforced by the 26th Brigade of Landwehr, occupied the ground facing Forts 1 to 6, waiting the opportunity to rush the intervening trenches.<sup>2</sup> The Belgian and British troops which still held the inner circle of fortifications could only wait bravely for the end. Machine guns swept their trenches ceaselessly, and only light artillery and old guns were in the forts to reply.

The British officer whose journal we have already quoted notes for the 8th October:—

What a night last night! Had an alarm, opened fire, but I think it was only a buzz. Two more surprise attacks during night. Extra sentries: sleep *nil*. Writing this huddled up in a trench. Shells whistling overhead. Had two lots of dust on my head. Weather fine. Pity to spend it here. This spasm started during breakfast.

We do look forward to the nights. No sleep, pitch dark, jolly cold; and suddenly: "Stand by!" and we peer into the inky blackness for the *Deutschers*.

*Later*.—We seem to be in a pickle. Our baggage party have just got here. Report the town in flames and all our gear gone. Shells coming in like one o'clock. Man on my side got a bit in his leg, but says he can shoot just as well on one leg. Belgian

<sup>1</sup> *Times* correspondent, 11th October 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 103.

artilleryman reports that he and two others are all that is left of our covering fort. We seem to have nothing to do but wait for the end! These trenches would be all right against savages, but against their huge artillery like so much dust. These shells come with a whizz like an express train, and then—crash! The spirits of our troop are top-hole. No one the slightest bit excited. Just smoking or yarning and dodging shells. . . . Here she comes! dip—crash! Saved again. Another non-stop for Antwerp. When they shorten the range for us—well, cheer oh! . . .

*Next day.*—About six last night we had a German attack on our left flank and drove them off.<sup>1</sup>

It now became evident that the defenders could not much longer hold the forts. General Paris, for his part, about 5.30 p.m., calculated that if the British naval division were to escape capture, it was more than time to order an immediate retreat, under cover of the darkness. General De Guise, Military Governor of Antwerp, was wholly in agreement, and gave orders that free passage was to be accorded to the British troops on the roads and bridges.<sup>2</sup> The retreat of the English necessarily brought about the retirement of the 2nd Belgian Army Division. This retreat began about seven o'clock in the evening, and the English naval brigade left its post about half-past seven. The retirement had to be effected under most difficult conditions, but was carried out in perfect order. The various Belgian and British units left posts and trenches in succession, passed through the town, and crossed the Scheldt by the Steen and Burght bridges. It was no easy task to break off the combat under the circumstances in which the troops found themselves. In certain places the Germans were not two hundred metres away from the Belgian trenches, and all movements of troops were impossible in the daylight. The manœuvre was, however, carried out with only slight losses.<sup>3</sup>

One battalion of the 1st Naval Brigade, the 2nd Brigade, the Marine Light Infantry, with the exception of one battalion, left to cover the retreat, marched all through the night between the 8th and 9th October, and took a train at Saint-Gilles-Waes. The rear-guard of marines arrived shortly afterwards in the course of the afternoon of the 9th, caught up in the flood of the fugitives from Antwerp. They boarded a train, but found that the rails had been cut at Moerbeke. When they reached that place, the train ran off the rails, under fire from some German detachments ambuscaded near by. For a minute confusion reigned. It was impossible to give the necessary orders in the darkness and among the crowd of civilian refugees. The battalion fought bravely and succeeded in cutting its way through; but more than half its members were left behind and were obliged to cross the Dutch frontier and submit to internment. Those who succeeded in passing through the enemy's lines pushed on to Selzaete, where they found a train which took them to Ostend.<sup>4</sup>

Three battalions of the 1st English Naval Brigade—which occupied, together with Belgian troops, the approaches of the forts from 1 to 4—do not seem to have been aware of the order for retreat; they comprised the Hawke, Benbow, and Collingwood battalions.<sup>5</sup> They withdrew on Friday, 9th October, passed through the city, and reached the quays. There they found the bridges destroyed, for in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 16th October 1914.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. Powell, *op. cit.* pp. 212-14.

<sup>4</sup> Report by General Paris.

<sup>2</sup> General Paris's Report.

<sup>5</sup> J. Buchan.

morning General De Guise had given orders for the destruction of communications between the two banks of the river. The bridges were blown up at 6 a.m.<sup>1</sup>

The English got across the Scheldt on rafts and in small boats. Some went up the river towards Holland, being unaware of the obligations of neutrality incumbent on that country: they were interned by the Dutch.<sup>2</sup> Others took the train to La Clinge; on the frontier, the train stopped. While certain energetic officers were forming up their men, with the intention of cutting their way through the enemy detachments which were already scouring Northern Flanders, the English major ordered the engine-driver to take the train to Terneuzen. When he learnt that this was impossible, he got down, and with all the men under his command crossed the Dutch frontier, leaving their equipment behind them.<sup>3</sup>

Another detachment got as far as Niewkerken, a station to the east of St.-Nicolas. From there they marched north, but at Koewacht they were surrounded by Germans and surrendered.<sup>4</sup>

In the afternoon of the 8th October, General De Guise had courteously declined the proposal of General Paris to protect the garrison's retreat with his naval division: the Military Governor wished to keep that honour for his own troops.<sup>5</sup> In the evening he left Antwerp with his staff, crossed to the left bank of the Scheldt, and went to the Fort Ste.-Marie. He ordered the garrison troops, who remained at Antwerp after the retreat of the 2nd Belgian Army Division and the troops of General Paris, to withdraw to the left bank of the Scheldt and to continue the resistance in the 5th sector of the fortress.

So the Belgians were the very last of all to leave Antwerp. When their rearmost detachments came to the place of embarkation and found every way of retreat destroyed, their stoical courage and coolness failed them. The long days of fighting had exhausted them mentally and physically: their nerve had been tried beyond human endurance. The idea of being left behind to fall into the hands of the Germans filled them with sudden fury. There were scenes of wild confusion: the men broke ranks and rushed at the few boats still available, crowded into them, and pushed off in frantic haste for the opposite bank. Some who had not succeeded in getting on board lost their heads, and fired at their comrades, who, already in midstream, refused to listen to their frantic appeals to return and pick them up.<sup>6</sup> But this regrettable scene did not last long. Order was re-established, and finally the last defenders of Antwerp reached the left bank of the Scheldt in safety.

All through the 8th of October the cannonade of Antwerp went on. Towards evening the Germans began to use their big guns. All witnesses agree that the bombardment during Thursday night and the early hours of Friday morning exceeded all imagination in its violence.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. iii. pp. 194-5.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 214-16.

<sup>3</sup> Article by a witness: "De Engelschman in Vlaanderen" in *l'Écho de Belgique* (London).

<sup>4</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* vol. iii. p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> See the British Admiralty's communiqué, published on 11th October (text in *The Times*, 12th October 1914).

<sup>6</sup> E. A. Powell, *op. cit.* p. 216.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200-2.

The effect of these huge guns was appalling. The reports sounded as though the Germans were firing full salvos—just as General Leman said of the bombardment of Fort Loncin.

The projectiles which now rained on the town were of huge proportions. The noise of their approach resembled the rush of an express train. They burst with the fury of a whirlwind. The ground shook under the explosions. When one of them struck a house, it did not merely carry away the top stories or blast a great hole in the walls, but all the building crumbled, smashed to pieces, and fell flat in a heap of bricks and clouds of dust.

Presently there was not, in the south quarter of the town, a single street which was not strewn with ruined masonry—except only in the district occupied by rich Germans, where nothing was touched. From over a dozen places large fires sent red reflections towards the sky.

The flight of inhabitants went on still. A witness writes:—

The Belgian artillery<sup>1</sup> passed my house on their retreat at seven in the evening. I had gone to the threshold for an instant, and a soldier of my acquaintance told me the Germans were at the gates of the town. I packed my valise in a hurry, and set out with one companion under the heavy fire of the huge German guns. . . . We had to get out of the line of shell fire; the shells fell in the same direction for nearly an hour. All retreat was cut off for us; only the troops were allowed to use the bridge of boats before Sainte-Anne. There was nothing left but the Eeckeren road. Thousands of vehicles were on the way with fugitives and their effects. We took five hours to get to Eeckeren, where I fell down with fatigue, for my valise was very heavy. It was then one o'clock in the morning, and we could find no food. We drank water.

A worthy peasant allowed us to spend the night in his barn, where there were already between two and three hundred persons. Suddenly, as I was dozing on the straw, I was wakened by a sound of brisk firing. Hence a general panic in the barn, and a rush for the door.

We thought the Germans had got to Eeckeren! . . . Fortunately it was only a Zeppelin attacking Fort Brasschaet. There followed the attack on the Merxem one, which replied as well as it could. The sky was lit up with shells, with shrapnel, and rifle fire: the surrounding country plainly visible. . . . At five o'clock in the morning we reached Capellen, where we were told a train was leaving at once for Holland. Between two and three thousand persons waited for it, and at 8 a.m. there appeared a train of between fifty and sixty cattle-trucks, in which we had to take up our places standing and crowded together. We waited, held up till ten o'clock; then at last we got off, and arrived at Roosendaal punctually.

It was in the course of Friday, 9th October, after the withdrawal of the garrison troops to the left bank of the Scheldt, that most of the forts of the first line of defence, on the right bank, to the north-east and north of Antwerp, ceased to resist. Fort Merxem was blown up that day; so was Dryhoek redoubt. Fort Brasschaet and the Audaeu redoubt were evacuated after the electric installations and the guns had been destroyed. On the same day, on the fourth sector, Forts Liezele and Breendonck fell.<sup>2</sup>

The bombardment of Antwerp stopped about midday. It had lasted for thirty-six hours, at the rate of from four to five shots a minute. A good number of houses had been destroyed, and the damage inflicted was valued at fifty million francs.<sup>3</sup>

According to a list secretly compiled during the first few days of the

<sup>1</sup> The men of the 2nd Army Division.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

German occupation, there were some two hundred lives lost among the inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

Having stood the siege during all the night from Thursday to Friday, and believing that the bulk of the army had carried out their retreat—it was known that the bridges of boats had been blown up at six that morning—the committee of leading citizens vainly searched for the whereabouts of General De Guise. It was not known that the Military Governor was at Fort Ste.-Marie.

Finally, after a long hesitation, it was resolved to send a delegation with a flag of truce to the German General Headquarters.

This delegation left in the morning in a motor; they took the Berchem-Vieux-Dieu road. The delegation was composed as follows: the burgomaster, De Vos; Councillors Franck and Ryckmans; and the Spanish Consul-General, and was accompanied by two attendants on bicycles.

At Berchem they were stopped. At this suburb the cannonade was intense. The motor slipped through Wilryck Gate in the direction of Contich. The members of the delegation had to remove the barbed wire from across the road with their own hands. On their arrival at Contich, the Germans blindfolded them, replaced the driver by a German chauffeur, and the cyclists by two soldiers who took up their posts on the steps of the car. At the General Headquarters, which, apparently, were at Malines, the Spanish Consul acted as intermediary.

When the delegates declared that the bombardment was useless, as the town was empty of troops, the Germans would not believe them—obviously, they feared a trap.<sup>2</sup> They had themselves just sent a flag of truce to Antwerp, and were amazed that the delegates had not encountered the bearer of it.

The German officer bearing the flag of truce had entered the town near Berchem just as the motor of the Belgian delegates passed through the Wilryck Gate. Those who saw the German envoy relate that his surprise was strongly tinged with fear: the silence which hung over the town was terrible and strangely disquieting. He met M. Georlette, the Brazilian Consul, in the Chaussée de Malines, and interrogated him, revolver in hand. He desired chiefly to know whether any Belgian soldiers were concealed in the cellars of the houses.

When the envoy entered the hôtel de ville, it was the Antwerp committee's turn to be surprised that he had not met their deputation. The German refused to treat with civilians, and withdrew. The news of his arrival had spread abroad and drew a crowd on to the Grand' Place. He insisted that the crowd should disperse before he left the building: "I entered an empty town, and wish to leave an empty one." Then he went to the Governor of the Province,

<sup>1</sup> The list appears in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 7th–8th November 1915.

<sup>2</sup> It should be pointed out here that the German commander seems to have thought that the Belgian field army was still in Antwerp, mistaking for the field army, escaped since the 6th October, the garrison troops of General De Guise. See on this very important point the pamphlet of Commandant L. Mamet, *Le rôle d'Anvers*, printed at the Zeist internment camp (Holland), and of which reproduction is forbidden. See especially the declaration of General Von Beseler to the Antwerp alderman, M. Franck, mentioned p. 13 of that pamphlet.

Baron Van de Werve, and interrogated him on the movements of the army. The Governor declared that he could give no information on this subject. Then the envoy returned to Contich, where the conditions of surrender were debated. The German general in command of the besieging army hesitated a long time, saying that civilians were not competent to treat in the matter, and that the case was without precedent. But finally both sides came to terms.<sup>1</sup>

Towards noon the first Germans entered the town. Their bearing and manner showed that they were not at all easy in their minds. First of all came dismounted cyclists, advancing with precaution from street to street and square to square. They held their rifles ready to fire at once at the slightest alarm. Behind them a brigade of infantry marched at a brisk pace. On the heels of the infantry came half a dozen mounted batteries at a trot. They traversed the city at a smart pace, and reached the quays, from whence they began to fire shrapnel at the Belgian troops occupying the opposite bank of the Scheldt. While the guns still fired on the old Tête de Flandre fort and the "Belvedere" and the Yacht Club, the infantry turned their attention to the bridge of boats, half of which had been destroyed. Without an instant's hesitation two soldiers dived into the river, swam the distance which separated the two fragments of the bridge in mid-stream, climbed on to the portion connecting with the left bank, and started off to reconnoitre.

On Friday night, although the cannonade had ceased, a dozen fires, which had smouldered under the débris, were still unextinguished. At eight in the evening all the part of the Marché de Souliers to the westward was alight. There was no means of fighting the flames: the water supply had been cut off since the destruction of the Waelhem reservoirs.

An American resident of Antwerp, Mr. Charles Whithoff, suggested to the German authorities that the spread of these flames should be prevented by dynamiting the adjacent houses. This was done, and the danger which threatened all the Place Verte, and might have reached even the cathedral, was averted.<sup>2</sup>

On Saturday morning, at 6 o'clock, the Belgian General Werbrouck appeared on behalf of the Military Governor, with a flag of truce, on the right bank. He was taken to the hôtel de ville, and there learnt that the civil authorities had signed the articles of surrender. He had no choice but to sign them too. Shortly afterwards General De Guise, with General Maes and his staff, gave himself up as a prisoner at Fort Ste.-Marie.

Some of the eastern and north-eastern forts of the outer circle were still in Belgian occupation. A deputy from the city repaired to Fort Schooten and informed the commander that the town would again be cannonaded at noon if the forts did not surrender. Consequently the forts Schooten and s'Gravenwezel were evacuated about

<sup>1</sup> We have followed the version published by *La Métropole* of 5th November 1914, under the heading "La reddition d'Anvers." This version corresponds, in its main outlines, with that given by E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, pp. 218-19. We have good ground for thinking *La Métropole's* version quite accurate as regards the facts stated.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Powell, *op. cit.* pp. 221-2.

2.30 p.m., after the electric installations and guns had been made unworkable. Fort Ertbrand, Smoutakker redoubt, and Fort Stabroeck were blown up by their garrisons; it is said that the officer in command of Fort Stabroeck refused to leave it, and met his death in the explosion.<sup>1</sup>

The garrison troops left in the fifth sector were in part forced back on to Dutch territory. As for the troops occupying the last forts, on 10th October the Dutch newspapers announced that trains were arriving at Roosendaal conveying the garrisons of the evacuated Belgian forts, that five hundred of these soldiers had crossed the frontier at Putte, and that two thousand men belonging to the garrisons of Forts Stabroeck and Ertbrand had been interned at Berg-op-Zoom. In all, four hundred officers and thirty-five thousand men of the garrison troops passed the Dutch frontier.<sup>2</sup>

As to the British troops which took part in the defence of Antwerp, they lost 37 killed, 193 wounded, nearly 1,000 missing, of whom more than 800 were captured by the Germans; 1,560 were interned in Holland.

Of the 1st Naval Brigade, 3,000 strong, less than 1,000 returned to England.<sup>3</sup>

It was not till during Saturday afternoon, 10th October, that the German army entered Antwerp in triumph, and was passed in review by the Military Governor, Admiral Von Schroeder, and General Von Beseler. These two took up their positions in front of the Palais Royal, surrounded by a brilliant General Staff. But they found no crowds to gaze at their arrogant display of power. In all the Place de Meir there were but two onlookers, who watched the scene from the balcony of the American Consulate. They were the war correspondent of the *New York World* and his friend, a Mr. Thompson. Let them speak:—

So far as onlookers were concerned, the Germans might as well have marched through the streets of ruined Babylon. . . . The streets were absolutely deserted; every building was dark, every window shuttered. . . . not a flag was to be seen. I think that even the Germans were a little awed by the deathly silence that greeted them. As Thompson dryly remarked: "It reminds me of a circus that's come to town the day before it's expected."

For five hours that mighty host poured through the cañons of brick and stone. . . . Company after company, regiment after regiment, brigade after brigade, swept by until our eyes grew weary with watching the ranks of grey under the slanting lines of steel. As they marched they sang, the high buildings along the Place de Meir and the Avenue de Keyser echoing to their voices thundering out "Die Wacht am

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> An inquiry which was instituted on the conduct of the troops of General De Guise resulted in the issue of an Order of the Day of Lieutenant-General Dossin. It was addressed "to the officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers interned" in Holland, and said: "I am happy to inform you that the Minister for War commands me to say to all, in his name, that the attitude of those who wish to cast suspicion upon you is inadmissible, and that no one has the right to utter any slighting commentary on this, unless manifest proof be offered to the contrary. The Minister cannot admit that our troops would have sought internment had they been able to act otherwise." Their conduct is very clearly vindicated and their merit in resisting to the last in the fifth sector is brought to light by Commandant L. Mamet in the already mentioned pamphlet, *Le rôle d'Anvers*.

<sup>3</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. vol. iii. p. 195.



Rhein," "Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles," and "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott." Though the singing was mechanical, like the faces of the men who sang, the mighty volume of sound, punctuated at regular intervals by the shrill music of the fifes and the rattle of the drums and accompanied always by the tramp, tramp, tramp of iron-shod boots, was one of the most impressive things that I have ever heard. Each regiment was headed by its field music and colours, and when darkness fell and the street lights were turned on, the shriek of the fifes and the clamour of the drums and the rhythmic tramp of marching feet reminded me of a torchlight political parade at home.

At the head of the column rode a squadron of gendarmes—the policemen of the army—gorgeous in uniform of bottle-green and silver, and mounted on sleek and shining horses. After them came the infantry—solid columns of grey-clad figures, with the silhouettes of the mounted officers rising at intervals above the forest of spike-crowned helmets. After the infantry came the field artillery, the big guns rattling and rumbling over the cobble-stones, the cannoneers sitting with folded arms and heels drawn in and wooden faces, like servants on the box of a carriage. These were the same guns that had been in almost constant action for the preceding fortnight and that for forty hours had poured death and destruction into the city. . . . After the field batteries came the horse artillery, and after the horse artillery the pom-poms—each drawn by a pair of sturdy draught horses driven with web reins by a soldier sitting on the limber—and after the pom-poms an interminable line of machine guns. . . . Then, heralded by a blare of trumpets and a crash of kettledrums, came the cavalry; cuirassiers with their steel helmets and breastplates covered with grey linen; hussars in befrogged grey jackets and fur busbies, also linen-covered; and finally the uhlans, riding amid a forest of lances under a cloud of fluttering pennons. But this was not all . . . for after the uhlans came the sailors of the naval division, brown-faced, bewhiskered fellows with their round, flat caps tilted rakishly and the roll of the sea in their gait; then the Bavarians in dark blue, the Saxons in light blue, and the Austrians—the same who had handled the big guns so effectively—in uniform of a beautiful silver-grey. Accompanying one of the Bavarian regiments was a victoria drawn by a fat white horse, with two soldiers on the box. Horse and carriage were decorated with flowers as though for a floral parade at Nice; even the soldiers had flowers pinned to their caps and nosegays stuck in their tunics. The carriage was evidently a sort of triumphal chariot dedicated to the celebration of the victory, for it was loaded with hampers of champagne and violins.

The American war correspondent concludes his account with these touching words<sup>1</sup>:—

As that great fighting machine swung past, remorseless as a trip-hammer, efficient as a steam-roller, I could not but marvel how the gallant, chivalrous, and heroic but ill-prepared little army of Belgium had held it back so long.

That army, torn by shot, exhausted almost to the point of death, now toiled along the roads to Flanders, marching towards its fate: towards the terrible and glorious epic of the Yser.

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Powell, *Fighting in Flanders*, p. 231. See also the photograph of the entry of the Germans, taken by Mr. Powell, on p. 228. The absence of all onlookers is even better depicted in the photograph in *The Illustrated War News*, part 11, p. 144.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE RETREAT TO THE YSER

As we have said, the retreat of the Belgian field army began in the evening of the 6th October. The operation, which was to effect the junction of the Belgians with the Franco-British forces, was attended by grave difficulties. It had to be carried out in the immediate neighbourhood of the enemy, and through a very narrow tract of country. First, there could be no doubt that Von Beseler's army, as soon as Antwerp was securely in its grip, would march in pursuit of the Belgians, who were exhausted by their efforts during the siege. Then the Germans would soon have forced their way across the Scheldt, and would march northward towards the Dutch frontier, to cut off the retreat of the defenders of Antwerp. Lastly, enemy troops were already present in the neighbourhood of Ghent, while various German units were effecting a concentration at Alost.<sup>1</sup>

So the Belgian retreat was not only threatened from the rear, but also on the flank. Each hour might bring a steady shrinkage of the narrow neck of land between the Scheldt and the Dutch frontier, the Lys and the coast of West Flanders. And if the right wing of the German army in France were rapidly extended to Nieupoort, the mouth of the passage would be stopped and the entire army forced to surrender.

So the principal duty incumbent on the Belgian High Command was to avert this fatal shrinkage of their narrow way of safety, and to transport their troops as quickly as possible westwards, so as to join the Allies while there was yet time.

With this object in view the 6th Division had been sent (6th October) to the support of the 4th, and to hold the enemy as soon as he was across the Scheldt, at Termonde and at points both above and below that town. The 3rd Division took up its position in the neighbourhood of Lokeren, in order to guard the passage northwards of Antwerp's last defenders, when the hour of their retreat struck.<sup>2</sup>

These measures had not been taken too soon. On the 7th, the Germans forced the passage of the Scheldt near Termonde, but they were held north of the river. The 6th Division troops were rushed up to Berlaere, where the 1st Carabinier Regiment had displayed a splendid spirit in repelling the thrust of those German troops which had crossed at Schoonaerde. Relieving the brave men who had suffered cruel losses at this point, the 6th Division—itself fatigued and strained by the terrible days of the siege—succeeded definitively in

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 61; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 66; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 108-9.

stopping the German advance on that bank of the Scheldt. The 6th Division was most effectively helped by de Witte's cavalry division, which guarded the bridgehead at Wetteren, between Schoonaerde and Ghent. By its audacious attacks, its general activity, and the opportune service of its batteries, this cavalry division ceaselessly disquieted the Germans and forced them to limit their operations on the Dendre and near Schoonaerde.<sup>1</sup>

So the danger from that quarter appeared, for the time at least, to be averted. But things were very different with regard to Ghent and to the south-west of that city. Already the enemy was making his appearance between the Scheldt and the Lys. Some cavalry, with guns and infantry, were signalled at Cruyshautem and at Nazareth.

This was a great peril. Ghent was not strongly defended at this moment. There were only some gendarmes, civic guards and volunteers there, as we mentioned above. Should Ghent fall, the defence of the Ghent-Terneuzen canal would be seriously imperilled, and this canal was the only barrier which could long hold up Von Beseler's pursuit.

As the promised British and French reinforcements had not yet arrived, the 4th mixed brigade was sent to Ghent.<sup>2</sup> At this moment, the 4th, 6th, and 3rd Divisions were east of the Terneuzen canal, the 5th was retreating westwards, and the 1st Division had been sent by rail from St.-Nicolas to Ostend, in order to cover the installation of the new base of supplies there.<sup>3</sup>

The retreat westwards is described for us by several British war correspondents. The correspondent of *The Times* <sup>4</sup> says :—

Many of the Belgian soldiers whom I met to-day had not had a shave or a haircut since before they hurled the invaders back from under the forts of Liège, but others were spruce and clean and wore their caps at an acute angle, which imparted a jaunty air. Some slept on the caissons and in the saddle, some sang a merry lilt, and several of the infantrymen, on whom the long trudge from Antwerp told most, laughingly joined in the chorus, although so footsore that they had discarded their boots. At every little wayside station there were trains packed with fantassins, chasseurs, and other line regiments—so packed, indeed, that the human cargo overflowed on to the roof, where alfresco breakfasts, and lunches of bread and beer were apparently the vogue. It was a motley throng, but happy enough, and certainly not disheartened. There were no darkening brows, no soured visages. Behind the scraggiest red beard—by the way, how many red-bearded soldiers there are in the Belgian army!—there was ever the happy word of salutation, and under the most ragged uniform the leal heart. The soldiers were delighted to speak with *vous autres*, and revelled in their experiences. . . . Presumably, everything that could be sent forward by petrol, everything that could be drawn or pushed, had been requisitioned to facilitate the great movement, so that, sandwiched between field-batteries, or mixed up with an endless variety of strictly military commissariat wagons, you would suddenly strike upon a weird collection of vehicles, pulled by horses, donkeys, or dogs.

Another correspondent says that he met the retreating troops near Lokeren.

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 108-9. See also Comm. W. M., "L'action de la 2<sup>e</sup> Division de cavalerie pendant la retraite de l'armée vers l'Yser," in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 22nd February 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Comm. W. M., "L'action de la 2<sup>e</sup> Division de cavalerie," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*; also *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> *Times*, 12th October 1914.

At first, near the coppices of the little woods, came a long line of cavalry, entering Lokeren. Then, there was an interval of about a mile, dotted with refugees, such as may now constantly be seen dragging themselves along the main roads. Then came an infantry regiment, bearing all the aspect of a retreating army. They were covered with dust, dirty, and footsore, but there was no disorder or confusion in their ranks. No stragglers—but a sad procession, nevertheless. Then came a long line of artillery, men and horses in first-rate condition, so that it was difficult to judge by their gait and appearance whether they were advancing or retreating.<sup>1</sup>

These accounts do justice to the orderly character of the retreat, which at no point degenerated into a rout; but they are perhaps too insistent on the bright side of things. They do not do justice to the superhuman efforts which the leaders had to exact from their men. It will be possible to form an idea of these if we follow the march of one particular regiment during the great retreat.

At about ten o'clock in the evening the 2nd Regiment of Chasseurs left Bouchout, near Antwerp, on the 6th October; they were glad to escape from the inferno in which they had lived and suffered for interminable days.

Early in the morning of the 7th the regiment reached the Scheldt and, in a state of utter fatigue, crossed the bridge thrown over the river at Burcht, near Antwerp. Jostled and hustled in the human torrent which was crowded together on the bridge and then overflowed along all the roads, they arrived at Melsele, near Beveren-Waes, after a ten hours' exhausting march. They took up their quarters there at eight in the evening, and fell asleep, fully clothed and rifle in hand, amid the incessant clamour which filled the streets of this little Flemish commune. It was not quite three o'clock in the morning of Thursday, 8th October, when the *réveillé* was sounded in the gloomy night. Once on their feet again, stupefied and broken with fatigue, the men let themselves be led along passively while their officers vainly endeavoured to shake them out of their coma. They went dumbly forward towards their unknown destiny, callous with exhaustion, but with a vague instinct of impending danger.

They skirted the Dutch frontier at a distance of a few kilometres and marched westward. They went along the narrow road, threading their way through an interminable row of lorries, guns, snorting motors; they were jostled and run into amidst a tumult of oaths and cries. League after league, village after village, they struggled on. A halt was called from time to time; then they flung themselves down and stretched their stiffened and swollen limbs in the fields on either side of the road. Then a whistle sounded; they had to rise and be off again. They had marched for fifteen hours. Evening fell. They went on. Now it was night; some limped with fatigue, others wept. Here and there a crippled man fell fainting in a ditch. At last, after twenty hours on the march, the 2nd Chasseurs reached their halting place, Assenede, just before midnight. They were allowed to rest there all the course of the 9th October.<sup>2</sup>

This was the day on which the enemy's advance north of the Scheldt could no longer be held back. On the evening of the 8th the

<sup>1</sup> Original description in the *Observer*, 11th October 1914.

<sup>2</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 23rd October 1915.

37th Brigade of Landwehr had repulsed the Belgians at Berlaere and Zele and come into contact with the 3rd Division at Lokeren. At 6 p.m. the troops of the Belgian field army were obliged to evacuate Lokeren and to retire behind the Ghent-Terneuzen canal. This proved bad news for the last defenders of Antwerp. It was not, indeed, till the night between the 8th and the 9th—as we have already recounted—that the 2nd Belgian Army Division and the British troops left the fortress to rejoin the main Belgian forces. However, the men of the 2nd Belgian Division and the main part of the British succeeded in escaping along the Belgian-Dutch frontier, bombarded on their way, at Moerbeke and Stekene, by the German artillery. The fact that the German forces posted near Lokeren did not advance rapidly towards the north and cut off the retreat of the Belgian 2nd Division and the British seems due to the presence of the garrison troops of General De Guise, still occupying the fifth Antwerp sector. It appears that they were mistaken by the German command for the bulk of the Belgian field army, and that fear of being attacked by these troops prevented the Germans from interfering with the retreat of the real Belgian field army.<sup>1</sup>

On the 9th October the 4th German Ersatz Division passed in its turn over the river at Schoonaerde and occupied Lokeren, while the 37th Landwehr Brigade advanced on Loochristy. German detachments moved rapidly northwards; and, as we have seen, they attacked some of the British marines and 1st Naval Brigade, and made them prisoners or forced them to take refuge in Holland. But the Belgian field troops, with the exception of their rear-guard, had succeeded in retiring and forming up behind the Ghent-Terneuzen canal. The difficulties of the first phase in the retreat had thus been surmounted.<sup>2</sup> The Belgians had succeeded in eluding the danger to their flank in the narrow strip of land between the Scheldt and Dutch territory. Behind the Ghent-Terneuzen canal they might breathe more freely. But they were not out of danger yet. To secure the success of the second phase of the retreat it was not enough that the rear-guard should hold back Von Beseler's forces on the northern bank of the Scheldt; the foe must also, at all costs, be prevented from falling on the Belgian flank through Ghent and Bruges. The defence of the neighbourhood of Ghent assumed extreme importance, as the Germans were in occupation of Alost and had been massing troops there since the 7th October. On the 9th the peril became more definite in this quarter. Part of the German forces moved forward on the district to the north of Lokeren, and the 1st Ersatz Division, with a Bavarian Landwehr contingent, left Alost for Quatrecht, Gontrode, and Lemberge.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, the impatiently awaited reinforcements had just arrived at Ghent. On the afternoon of the 8th October a brigade of French Marine Light Infantry had alighted at Ghent, and on the 9th there came the first elements of the British 7th Division. The French marines had passed on the 8th, in the morning, a military train full of Belgians in the Thourout station, and Frenchmen and Belgians frater-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Commandant L. Mamet, *Le rôle d'Anvers*.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 61; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 109; Comm. W. M., "L'action de la 2<sup>e</sup> Division de cavalerie," loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 61-2; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 109.

nized cordially. The Belgians were recruits for the carabiniers, and were going to a training camp in France. The French proclaimed that they were going to the help of Antwerp; they were still ignorant that the fall of this fortress was imminent. The brigade had had orders to be ready to leave for Dunkirk on the 4th. They embarked on the 7th.<sup>1</sup> When they reached Dunkirk, under Admiral Ronarch's command, they were ordered to continue their course towards Belgium; they were to support the Belgian army in its defence of Antwerp. Without doubt this decision was the result of the Franco-British negotiations of which we spoke apropos of Mr. Winston Churchill's intervention.

It was only on arriving at Ghent on the afternoon of the 8th October that Admiral Ronarch learnt that Antwerp was doomed and the Belgian army in full retreat. But the arrival of the marine fusiliers at Ghent was providential. It enabled the 4th mixed Belgian brigade, under the command of Major-General Scheere, which had been detailed for service at Ghent, to be relieved. Admiral Ronarch's brigade was composed of two regiments of three battalions each and a body of machine guns—about six thousand men. The last of these troops reached Ghent in the evening of the 8th October.

On the 9th, at half past four in the morning, the marines left for Melle; the Belgians had prepared trenches to the south of that town. A part of the 2nd Regiment took up its position between Gontrode and Quatrecht, and left one battalion in reserve to the north of Melle. Part of the 1st Regiment occupied a position from Heusden to Gaudenhaut, with a battalion in reserve at Destelbergen. The rest of the brigade served as a general reserve at the cross-roads of Schelde, where the admiral took up his quarters. What remained of the terrain to be defended in the loop formed by the Scheldt south of Ghent was occupied by the Belgian volunteers between Lemberge and Schelderode.<sup>2</sup>

These troops had no artillery. Without the support of field batteries they would be incapable of prolonging their resistance for the time necessary to accomplish their purpose. The artillery of the 4th mixed brigade was accordingly called in. It had won credit at Haelen and had worked hard during the siege of Antwerp. It was composed of the 7th, 8th, and 9th batteries—twelve guns in all. It was posted at Lindenhoeck, a hamlet south-west of Melle, from whence it could command the approaches to the flat country.<sup>3</sup>

At noon the Germans, coming from Alost, first got into touch with the 2nd Regiment of the marine brigade. The invaders were by far the more numerous body, and their artillery the more powerful. Their principal effort was directed against Quatrecht, which barred the main road from Alost to Ghent. The enemy's first onslaught was stopped by murderous salvos. A marine would say, in his graphic idiom, that "The Germans went down like ninepins." But they came on again in force. The commandant of the marine fusiliers called up his reserve, which was at once replaced at Melle by a battalion of the general

<sup>1</sup> See Charles Le Goffic, *Dixmude, un chapitre dans l'histoire des Fusiliers marins*, Paris, 1915; translated into English, *The Epic of Dixmude*, London, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Le Goffic, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*; W. Breton, "L'artillerie de la quatrième brigade mixte à Quatrecht," in *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Le Goffic, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*; W. Breton, "L'artillerie de la quatrième brigade mixte à Quatrecht," in *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, *loc. cit.*

reserve. The French resisted energetically, admirably supported by the Belgian artillery. A German cannon was set up 800 metres away from the Belgian guns; before it had fired its fourth shot the Belgian gunners had shot down all its crew and destroyed team and carriage. The German fire was wide, and caused very little damage; only three shells grazed the church at Melle. At six o'clock in the evening the attack was at an end; but the enemy remained in the vicinity and consolidated his positions.

At eleven o'clock a rocket signal rose above the German lines, announcing the renewal of their attack. They had received artillery reinforcements. Presently their infantry advanced; they crept along ditches, through gardens, and hugged hedges, like rats, under the fire of the marines and the Belgian artillery. They still came on. Presently Gontrode had to be abandoned, and the defenders fell back on Melle, where the railway embankment offered an excellent defensive position. The enemy came on steadily. The machine guns opened a deadly fire, causing them heavy losses. The ranks of the assailants fell into disorder. In an instant the French marines sprang from their shelters, with bayonets fixed, and drove the Germans headlong before them, with one superb charge. It was then four o'clock in the morning. At seven the Germans evacuated Gontrode and Quatrecht, abandoning their wounded. The French marines at once reoccupied Gontrode.<sup>1</sup>

The British troops now appeared upon the scene. They had reached Ghent the night before, in superb order and condition, whistling "Tipperary" as they passed through the streets. They received an enthusiastic welcome.

These troops formed a considerable part of the 7th Division, and were under the command of General Capper. They had disembarked at Ostend and Zeebrugge on the 6th. On the 8th, the 3rd Division of the British cavalry followed them at Zeebrugge. These troops formed the nucleus of the 4th Army Corps, commanded by Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson. Sir Henry had visited Antwerp on the 6th, and assured himself personally of the desperate situation of the fortress. He therefore established his headquarters at Bruges, and transferred them to Ostend on the 8th October. No longer being able to attempt to help Antwerp, he sent part of the 7th Division to Ghent to help the French marines in covering the Belgian retreat.<sup>2</sup>

These British reinforcements raised the number of the troops guarding the approach to Ghent on the east and south-east to between 25,000 and 30,000 men.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the success of the marine fusiliers at Melle and the arrival of the British at Ghent, the German operations against this latter town were dangerous and disquieting. The Belgian army was behind the Terneuzen-Ghent canal, with rear-guards to the east of the canal towards Loochristy, Lokeren, Wachtebeke, and Moerbeke.

<sup>1</sup> Charles le Goffic, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*; W. Breton, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>2</sup> J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, iii. pp. 33-5. The British 7th Division is supremely famous for its heroism. In three weeks it lost 356 officers out of 400, and 9,664 soldiers out of 12,000. See E. W. Hamilton, *The First Seven Divisions. Being a Detailed Account of the Fighting from Mons to Ypres*, London, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 62.



The canal formed a timely line of defence and delayed pursuit. But the attacks upon Ghent by the Germans operating from Alost seriously endangered the defence of this line, and might easily develop into a direct menace to the flank of the Belgians in retreat on Bruges.<sup>1</sup> And on the other hand, if the enemy made a dash due westward with the forces massed at Alost, the retreating army might be turned and finally cut off from the Allies. It was therefore decided not to cling to the line of the Ghent-Terneuzen canal; there was another canal line, that of Schipdonck, prolonged by the river Lys. If it were possible to defend this new front successfully, a considerable portion of Flanders would be saved from invasion. But this task was impossible for the weary Belgian army, if it were left to its own resources. It was necessary first to effect a junction with the Allies. The Allies were certainly moving with this object in view, but on the morning of 10th October there seemed no likelihood that they would arrive in time to be of use. The left wing of the French was reaching Arras, and the British troops destined to extend this left wing were only just arriving at St.-Omer. The Germans were near Lille.

Under these conditions the plan to defend the line of the Schipdonck canal had to be given up. A position further to the rear was chosen: the King decided on the Yser.<sup>2</sup>

The line of the Yser offered several advantages. It might form a natural extension of the Anglo-French front, which stretched from Lassigny towards Arras. The junction between the Belgian and Franco-British lines would here be very strong. The line of the Yser also, in itself, forms a good defensive position. Its left flank is based on the sea, where the Allies hold the mastery. The river forms a barrier in front; the right flank is protected by its windings, which bend inwards to the west. Moreover, the extent of this line is not disproportionate to the mass of troops at the Belgians' disposal. And, finally, it is the last foothold on national soil.<sup>3</sup>

This position was definitively selected, and the move to the Thourout-Dixmude-Nieuport zone began on 10th October.<sup>4</sup>

On the same day the troops which barred the German advance at Ghent had received orders to keep their positions. They had been reinforced by two Belgian and British battalions. Towards midday the Germans attacked again, with such violence that both Gontrode and Quatrecht had to be evacuated anew. As on the previous day, the railway embankment stopped the German rush. The night passed quietly.

On Sunday, 11th October, the Belgian army having achieved its retirement to the second water-line on the Schipdonck canal, and having no longer to fear anything from an advance on Ghent, the covering troops were ordered to retreat to Bruges. It was high time. Large German forces were moving along the two banks of the Scheldt near the bend of the river: their long grey lines twisted and glided forward to encircle the heroes of Melle. In order to avoid being entangled, General Capper gave orders for a night march to Aeltre, at the intersection of the roads to Bruges and to Thielt. The French

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 63-4; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, loc. cit.; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 64.      <sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 110.

were to start at seven in the evening, the British at nine: the Belgians were to lead the van.<sup>1</sup>

When the French marines passed through Ghent again, they were generously cheered, and were profoundly touched by this demonstration at a moment when they might seem to be leaving the town to its fate.<sup>2</sup> They had hardly left when the enemy attacked again, at eight o'clock. This time British bayonets met the Germans and the 7th Division drove them back. At the appointed hour, nine o'clock precisely, the British soldiers broke off the engagement without confusion and began an orderly retreat, executed as though on parade, under the infernal fire of the enemy's guns.<sup>3</sup> They followed the French marines through Aeltre as far as Thielt. There the Allied troops separated, the French making for Dixmude by way of Cortemarck and Zarrere and the British marching to Roulers, and thence to Ypres. The retreat was eventful—50,000 Germans followed hard on the heels of the French marines, but were put off the track by the burgher master of a place on the line of march. This patriotic official was interrogated as to the route the French had taken, and directed the Germans to the wrong track. But he paid for his loyalty with his life.<sup>4</sup>

While the French marines were moving back towards the Yser the various Belgian divisions had crossed the Schipdonck canal on 12th October, and were now on the western bank of this natural barrier. Only one railway was available for the transport of the force which it might be desired to entrain for the Yser. This was the Eecloo-Bruges, Bruges-Thourout line. It was only a single line, and the transport was thus greatly impeded. The units which would be forced to continue the retreat on foot were already half-dead with fatigue.<sup>5</sup> It was therefore urgent that the enemy's pursuit should be held up as much as possible on all the available water-lines. The Lys must be barred to the south-west of Ghent, so that the Belgian army could carry out its movements between the river and the coast in safety: once again they had to pass along a narrow neck of ground. It was certainly wider than that formed by the Scheldt and the Dutch frontier between Antwerp and the Terneuzen-Ghent canal, but could no more than the former territory afford to be narrowed by a German flank attack from the east: and such an attack was preparing. Several German divisions from Antwerp were advancing westwards by forced marches, and also quite fresh German units had arrived in Belgium. The 22nd, 23rd, 26th, and 27th Reserve Corps left Germany on 11th October. They consisted chiefly of South German from Würtemberg and Bavaria, although some Hanoverians were also among them. They were concentrated at Brussels, and began their march westward without losing an hour.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Charles Le Goffic, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.; W. Breton, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Le Goffic, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.; W. Breton, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 110-11.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Le Goffic, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 111.

<sup>6</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 64; J. Buchan, *op. cit.* vol. iv. p. 37.

To protect the Lys against this threat the Belgians had only General Witte's 1st Cavalry Division at their disposal. A second mobile unit was necessary to bar the passage of the Schipdonck canal to the German columns which were hard on the heels of the Belgians. And so, in the very midst of the great retreat, there was formed the 2nd Cavalry Division. On 12th October, just as the army had completed the movement across the canal, the King placed a few divisional regiments of horse at the disposal of General de Monge, and ordered him to co-ordinate the action of these scattered elements and, from the next day, to keep them in touch with the enemy, with a view to delaying his movements as far as possible.<sup>1</sup>

The new division comprised squadrons which had been fighting for two months and a half on end, and whose ranks had been depleted. A modest contingent of cyclist-carabiniers and some motor-cars with machine guns. Artillery they had none, though it was indispensable. Because of this circumstance, General de Monge took special measures from the 13th October. He could not maintain himself behind the Schipdonck canal without artillery: he therefore resolved on a bold movement across the canal in order to hold back the Germans. Horsemen and cyclists must throw themselves boldly across the enemy's path, regardless of the risky nature of these tactics.

The bulk of this new division assembled in the dawn of the 13th near the village of Waerschoot, south of Eecloo, and awaited events. Squadrons were despatched towards all points of danger: to Cluysen and Everghem, near the Terneuzen canal, and to the bridge of Appensvoorde, over the Ghent-Bruges canal. The rest of the division remained west of the Schipdonck canal. Presently the enemy was signalled. From the 13th Von Beseler's advance guard had been in touch with the Belgian advanced squadrons. The German advance guard was in great force, and foreshadowed an inflowing tide pouring in rapid waves from the east. Infantry, cavalry, and guns appeared at Appensvoorde, at Lovendeghem, and Hulleken. Soon, an imposing body of troops occupied Cluysen. To the north, numerous cavalry and foot-soldiers crossed the canal at Selzaete (the Ghent-Terneuzen canal), and reached Oost-Eecloo. The Germans were thus advancing in three converging directions.

The Belgian outposts attacked the heads of the German columns, according to instructions, forcing them to deploy, and then suddenly withdrawing at a gallop, to repeat the same manœuvre further west. The enemy, thoroughly misled, advanced with caution, believing that they had before them a much larger force than was actually the case; thus they lost invaluable time. But the situation of the main body of the 2nd Cavalry Division became serious in the neighbourhood of Waerschoot. Although greatly retarded by the fierce resistance of the Belgian advanced squadrons, the concentric movement of the Germans continued with mathematical exactness. Already enemy units had appeared on the other side of the Schipdonck canal at Everghem bridge: the Belgians at Waerschoot were in danger of envelopment. It was now eleven o'clock in the morning. The Germans had been held long enough for the retreat of the main

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the action of these troops see Comm. W. M., "L'action de la Division de cavalerie," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 24th and 26th February 1916.

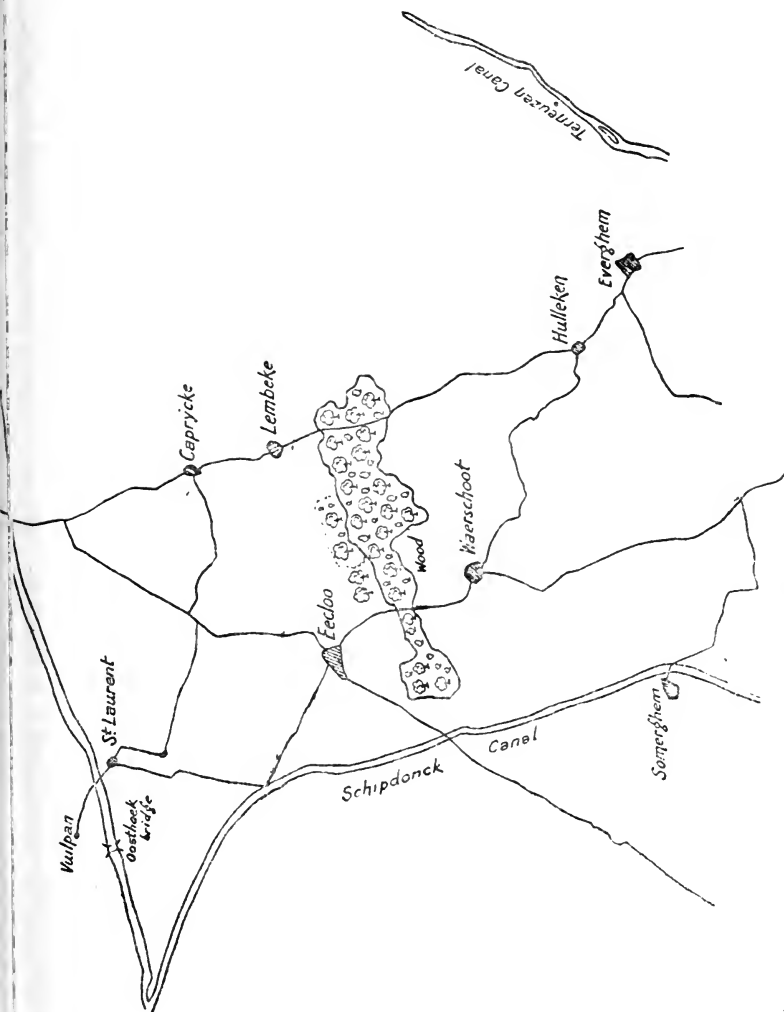
Belgian field army westward to be secured. General de Mon, therefore ordered his troops to abandon the line of the canal and to fall back on Oedelem by way of Ursel. The movement was carried out without difficulty, under cover of the armoured cars and cyclists. The enemy advancing from Somerghem was contained by the 2nd squadron of the 2nd Mounted Chasseurs, who, by their energetic resistance prevented the Germans from harassing the retreat of the main column. On the evening of the 13th the 2nd Cavalry Division reached the neighbourhood of Bruges, where they passed a quiet night in the cantonments.

The Germans, being quite ignorant of the strength of the force opposed to them, advanced at a slow pace. The new division had excellently fulfilled its covering mission, but this task was not executed without sad losses: yet some of the forces composing this newly formed unit won for it a glory that veteran soldiers might well envy.

One of the advanced squadrons, for instance, under Commandant Nÿssens, came to close quarters at Hulleken with a strong enemy force on the march from Everghem towards Waerschoot. Nÿssens had formerly belonged to the 2nd Lancer Regiment. The Belgians fought and clung to the Germans up to the moment when they found themselves almost completely surrounded. As he gave the order to break off the fight, Nÿssens must have known that to his rear the obvious line of retreat—the Eecloo-Waerschoot road—was occupied by the enemy. So he turned more to the south and marched towards Somerghem, where he hoped to find Belgians guarding the crossing of the Schipdonck canal. On arriving near Somerghem he learnt that the Germans were installed there. Fortunately night was falling. Nÿssens determined to escape northwards in the darkness. In spite of overwhelming fatigue, all the little band were ready for anything rather than surrender. They slipped through the night, by woods and fields, avoiding the main roads. The Germans are everywhere. Lembeke is in their hands. The squadron throws itself through the woods again, brushing aside the German cyclists' attacks, and gallops to Caprycke. Germans there, also! Not losing hope, Nÿssens turns south-west and passes to the north of Eecloo. The Germans bar all the roads!

There is but one remaining chance. To approach the Dutch frontier as closely as possible, to skirt it and slip through the meshes of the net which is being drawn ever closer. The horses of some of the men are absolutely foundered and fall helpless. Those who still have the use of their mounts traverse the dense woods at full speed, and push on to Saint-Laurent, which is only separated from the Dutch frontier by the Leopold canal. Happily the village is free from Germans. The agonizing ride from point to point had, however, lasted all night: all were at the end of their strength. It is daybreak. Nÿssens bivouacs his men on the north bank of the Leopold canal and has guards posted at the bridge which leads from the main street of the village to the opposite bank and from thence to the little village of Vuilpan, in Dutch territory.

The nocturnal wanderings of the Belgians have not, however, escaped the enemy's notice. The Germans scour the country for



THE COMBAT OF SAINT-LAURENT.

the adventurous squadron, and, suspecting its design, occupy the Oosthoek bridge, west of Saint-Laurent. The last loophole of escape is barred! And yet, Nÿssens does not despair. If the Germans are unaware that he is north of the canal, he may perhaps slip between their patrols in the night.

The day passes without an alarm. But at three in the afternoon a cyclist appears in hot haste, with the announcement that an enemy force—horse, foot, and guns—is making for Saint-Laurent. The die is cast: and Nÿssens decides not to leave the soil of his native land, but if need be to die where he stands, with all his men. He posts his men on the (north) bank of the canal in such a fashion that they can cover all the exits of the village with their fire. Two German cyclist columns appear on the main road: Nÿssens is about to give the order to open fire, when he sees the burgomaster of Saint-Laurent tearing along in front of the advancing enemy.

"Where is the officer in command?" shouts the burgomaster almost out of his mind with horror at the idea of the combat about to devastate his village. "I must see him at once!" Nÿssens comes forward: "M. le Commandant, I am deputed by the German general to say you must withdraw immediately." "Sir, your behaviour disgusts me. Go!" "The Germans have thousands of men at their disposal: their guns are aimed at you, and if you do not leave your position, the cannonade will begin."

"Tell the German general that I laugh at his machine guns and his men: there are men who defended Liège here, and they never abandon their posts! And now go, or I will open fire. I have said my last word."

A few minutes afterwards, the fight began. The Belgian cavalrymen, surprised by the violence of the attack and unable to see their enemies, who are in shelter at a distance, become slightly disorganized. At once Nÿssens comes forward, as far as the bridge, to point out to his men where they should best aim. As he thus dauntlessly exposes his life, a bullet grazes his forehead: another pierces the skirt of his cloak. He falls back on the opposite bank, moving slowly and calmly, wiping the blood off his impassive face. At this moment a shot fractures his thigh, and flings him senseless into the ditch beside the road. Five of his men spring towards him: under the enemy's fire they lift him gently and remove him from this dangerous spot, towards the rear.

The others are fighting meanwhile, burning their last powder. The Germans cannot force the passage of the bridge, but they cross the canal to the west and fall upon the Belgian flank. There are now only a hundred Belgians left, and of this number some have to remain idle, guarding the horses. They can no longer hold the position. The officer in command orders a retreat into Dutch territory: some of these heroes offer up their lives to protect their comrades' withdrawal.

Commandant Nÿssens was still unconscious when he was carried to the Dutch post which was guarding the frontier. As soon as he revived he had the presence of mind to protest against the action of his men, and to make the Dutch sergeant formally record that he was taken into Holland without his knowledge or consent, having meant to

on Belgian soil.<sup>1</sup> This formal protest enabled the authorities to let him free to rejoin his Belgian comrades when his wound had been healed.

While this heroic episode was taking place, the main body of the 2nd Cavalry Division spent the night at Bruges, and on the morning of 14th October took up their position on the plain of Belleghem, about half-way between Bruges and Ghisteltes. Scouting parties, composed of cavalry, cyclists, and armoured cars with machine guns, scoured the country searching for the enemy, who had occupied Bruges on the 13th and would probably reach Bruges in the course of the day. The enemy moved cautiously forward.

In the morning of the 14th two of the squadrons, on outpost duty on the road from Bruges to Thourout, at Heidelberg and Zuidwege, had a brisk encounter with strong German reconnaissances. The German horsemen were received with a strong fire, and turned tail, leaving several dead and wounded behind. Seeing that the Belgians kept a sharp lookout, the Germans only sent out a few patrols from time to time: and these scouts made themselves very scarce at the slightest threat. By the afternoon, General de Monge was relieved of all anxiety as to the fate of the main army in its retreat on the Yser. He gave orders to fall back on Ghisteltes. The enemy did not endeavour to prevent this movement.

On 15th October the 2nd Cavalry Division took up its position along the Moerdÿk canal, to the east of Ghisteltes. They remained there for some hours on observation duty, searching the district with their patrols. In the afternoon, General de Monge, knowing that the retreat on the Yser might be considered accomplished, himself fell back towards the river. He reached Furnes at 8 p.m., having carried out his difficult covering duty to perfection.<sup>2</sup>

The 1st Cavalry Division, under General de Witte, performed the same mission to the right of the main army. It protected the line of the Lys, and had some skirmishes with the enemy, especially at Meerendré. It fell back fighting through Lootenhulle, on the left of the retreating forces, and made for the Forest of Houthulst, south-east of Dixmude.<sup>3</sup>

Protected thus by the cavalry, the troops, ammunition, and commissariat were transported from Bruges towards the Yser. Part of the army went by rail, on the Bruges-Thourout line. The constant use of this single line at high pressure was a terrible strain on the personnel of the railway, but they stuck to it with splendid devotion.<sup>4</sup> Other units followed the main roads; they went by Ghisteltes, Eerneghem, Belleghem, Thourout, and by the shortest way from Ostend to Nieupoort, along the dunes.<sup>5</sup> Some of these columns had reached on the 13th the Eerneghem-Wÿnendaele Wood front, where their line was

<sup>1</sup> See, for details of the achievements of Nÿssens and his men, A. 'P. F., "Le combat de Saint-Laurent," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* of 1st April 1915; Comm. W. M., "L'action de la 2<sup>e</sup> Division de cavalerie," in the *Courrier de l'Armée*, 24th February 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Comm. W. M., "L'action de la 2<sup>e</sup> Division de cavalerie," in *Courrier de l'Armée*, 5th February 1916.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 65; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> See the 13th sketch in *La campagne de l'armée belge*.

continued to the right, towards Cortemarck, by the French marines.<sup>1</sup>

Along the sand dunes by the shore, other units advanced toward Nieuport. A witness says: "I have seen foot-soldiers stiffen to attention before their superior officers, and march smartly through village streets, only to fall like logs at the roadside when a halt was called. Stubborn cyclists, in torn and patched uniforms black with dust, pedalled mechanically along the bumpy, badly paved roads. The regiments marched along the beach, the sea moaning monotonously and eerily on their right. Over the sand banks, among the pools, with their haversacks and rifles on their shoulders, they went forward; their ranks were orderly and steady, but their pace somewhat slow. Battalion on battalion, each led by mounted officers . . . they appeared emerging from the mist and fog and passing into it again, like the army of some ancient legend. In the distance the lighthouse of Dunkirk, lighted early in the twilight because of the fog, flashed its revolving flame in irregular pulsations."<sup>2</sup>

Suddenly an order ran along the ranks from end to end. They halted. Why? Were they not to go on, still go on, to Dunkirk, which was dimly visible afar in the glare from the lighthouse, and where they might at last rest themselves and sleep?

As the incoming troops had taken their places on the Yser front—some arriving later than others, owing to the chances of routes and means of conveyance—an Army Order had already been read to them. Now the latest arrivals were to hear it.

It was a proclamation of the King to his army, dated 13th October and ran as follows:—

#### SOLDIERS,

For two months and more you have fought for the most just of causes, for your homes and the independence of our nation. You have held up the enemy's forces, undergone three sieges, carried out several sorties, and effected a long retreat on limited terrain without losses.

Up till now, you have been isolated in this awful struggle.

Now you are side by side with the brave armies of France and Britain. It is your duty to continue to sustain the glory of our arms with that courage and endurance you have already displayed so often. Our national honour demands it.

#### Soldiers,

Face the future with confidence. Fight well. In the positions in which I place you, look only before you—not behind; and consider that man a traitor to our country who speaks of retreating unless a formal order has been given.

The time has come, with the help of our mighty Allies, to drive from the soil of our dear country the foe who invaded it in defiance of his plighted word and of the sacred rights of a free people.

ALBERT.<sup>3</sup>

This manly proclamation, with its note of proud confidence, had a magic effect on the men. Then it was indeed true, as had been whispered during the last stage of their journey, that there was an end to flight: they did not admit defeat. The King gave orders to defend the last remnant of Belgian soil. And finally, they were no longer

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> P. Nothomb, "La bataille de l'Yser," in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15th September 1915, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 69-70.



alone. Already, from Ypres, the British were manœuvring to join the French, who were coming up by forced marches. Together now they would all stop the enemy's advance, and perhaps fling him back routed at the moment he believed himself sure of victory.

Yes, the retreat was at an end. The army took up its position on the Yser on the evening of the 14th. Only the old classes of troops—the garrisons—continued their march towards French territory. On the road from Furnes to Dunkirk they might be seen: there were some thirty thousand of them, and they were almost lost among the crowds of refugees, whose number was more than double theirs. Most of them had neither rifle nor haversack; they were dead with fatigue, disbanded, and still suffering from the effects of the appalling bombardment at Antwerp and the protracted sufferings of the retreat. They staggered straight on till the gendarmes stopped them on the frontier.<sup>1</sup> And when they had reached French soil, they still wandered aimlessly and helplessly about for the first few days, and their presence and appearance made the French peasants take them for the last remnants of the dispersed and beaten Belgian army—but wrongly so!

These garrison troops were finally rallied, concentrated, and able after a time to take their places again to the rear of the Belgian front line.

What, meanwhile, had become of those troops of volunteers who had been fighting in Limburg during the month of September, and whose work had been abruptly ended on the 27th of that month by the investment of Antwerp?

Their adventures are worthy of interest: they form a part of the story of the retreat.<sup>2</sup> They were cut off from the Belgian regulars, and could not maintain the occupation of Limburg. On 3rd October they passed through Turnhout and Merxplas, reaching Brasschaet about four o'clock in the afternoon. They marched rapidly; outposts, entrenchments, barricades, loomed up before them in the dark. They entered the enceinte of Antwerp through a strongly defended gateway. A halt was called. They lay down on the pavement. An hour later they took their places in an interminably long train, which rolled silently into the night without lights or whistle. Sometimes the long and deep thunder of great guns reached their ears. They were passing behind the outer forts of the fourth sector: Breendonck, Liezele, Bornhem. The siege was in full swing. Finally, they got out at Dostcamp, about six kilometres south of Bruges. The next day they were installed in the Poermolen Barracks at Bruges. They spent a week there, drilling, marching, and practising rifle-shooting at the communal range. They had also to keep guard over a certain number of captive German officers. At 8 a.m. on the 13th, as the regiment was leaving barracks, a Taube flung two bombs which exploded on the building.

The volunteers now formed the first line of defence for the Ostend base, and single companies were reconnoitring the country round Bruges, where the enemy was expected to make his appearance.

<sup>1</sup> E. Van der Velde, "La Bataille de l'Yser," in *The Nineteenth Century and After* March 1916, pp. 585-6.

<sup>2</sup> We recount them here, following the diary of a volunteer which was published in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 24th December 1915 under the title "D'Anvers à l'Yser."

Our company (says one of the volunteers in his diary) had to defend *d'outrancé* the iron bridges of the double canal Léopold at the tenth milestone on the Bruges-Sluis road. At Dudzeele some cyclists warned us that there was already an exchange of firing at Steenbrugge, and that the enemy was moving rapidly in the direction of the sea (with cavalry, cyclists, and machine guns). . . . We had orders to destroy the bridges if the enemy appeared in force. . . . We took up our lines close to the canal. . . . The refugees from Bruges formed a fearful crowd—people on foot and vehicles of every description. The whole crowd wept, cried, lamented their fate, and declared that Bruges was invaded by German troops.

Two local trains had stopped on the line, one directly in front of the other. They could not move forward. They were loaded with civil guards wearing their uniforms, but unarmed. They are most anxious to reach Holland, in view of the special danger which threatens them of being shot down without quarter and without being able to defend themselves, as francs-tireurs, for the enemy will only treat them as such.

At half past ten in the evening supplies arrived, together with the order to abandon the bridges and gain Zuyenkerke without delay. Passing through Dudzeele a little after midnight, we are informed that a body of troops from the east is about to enter the village. Is it the battle at last?

At four o'clock we proceed to reconnoitre. We hear quite distinctly the heavy tread of a large body of men. We stood motionless in the darkness, pressed against a wall. Two men, whose outline we could not distinguish, brushed against us. They were armed. Two others followed, about twenty metres behind. We have no electric torch.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

They all stopped: four men together, and the rest behind them in a group in the alley.

No answer. The click of rifles in the silence. We could touch them, but we cannot see them. The anxiety only lasts a few seconds . . . it is a company of our own regiment, the rearmost, which is to get round by the bridges of the Zeebrugge canal. We continue on our way.

. . . At half past two we are at Zuyenkerke; not a soul to be seen. . . . A volunteer wakes me from my sleep amidst the straw; it is broad daylight. From far away comes the rumbling of guns. An aviator hovers above the village. Apparently other aviators have come to reconnoitre. There are none of our troops still in the vicinity. We are cooking our soup when the order comes to make for Ostend at once. We are far from our goal; the order was dated the evening before. The cyclist who brought it was not able to find our regiment! Bread and meat are loaded on wagon . . . time to eat later!

At two o'clock in the afternoon we are at Le Coq. A few people still in the villas. All the wounded have been removed. Gendarmes hurry by on cycles. They are pressed for time, and can only say: "You'll be lucky if you get there in time."

After having had a meal at Le Coq, the company starts out again along the coast. At Bredene night falls. All is quiet. Then "Halt!" Our scouts have been told that the Germans are in possession of Bruges, and at Ostend that the last boat have left the port, and the Belgian troops have evacuated the town.

Let us push forward and enter Ostend. We shall hear more—and, again, we have no other choice. In the darkness we cross some Place where the station is. One can see nothing of it. There is an indescribable scene of confusion, of *roule*. Hordes of civilians fleeing and dragging weird loads: held up at every step. How do we learn that our regiment has reached Nieuport? Is it true? Are we really going to leave Belgium? Our commandant has just received the order to go to Furnes. . . . A local train, the last from Ostend, takes us at last, past endless rows of poor people—women, children, old men. The lamps in our carriages give us a dim glimpse of them as they struggle through the night. At each stopping-place the compartments become fuller. There are hospital attendants among us, men with severe wounds, men with contagious illnesses. Machine guns and big batteries roll along beside us, among the crowd of soldiers of all arms, hurrying south-westward. . . . We cross a train—also a local—which is returning to Ostend; it has six passengers, all gendarmes.

"Where are you going to?"

"Going to see what is happening over there; to report on it."

They make a significant gesture. None of these gallant fellows expects to come back alive.

Having reached Furnes, the volunteers were ordered to Dunkirk. They arrived there on the 15th October, and took ship for Calais. On the 19th the regiment was disbanded, and distributed among the regular regiments. Thus they were flung into the great Yser battle when it was in full swing.

Whilst the army was thus successfully completing the perilous retreat, the Belgian Government had formed the decision to leave Belgium and accept the hospitality of the French Republic at Havre.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Government had arrived at Ostend during the siege of Antwerp, an extraordinary animation had reigned in the former city. Officers and officials prepared notes, sent off reports, telephoned, at feverish speed. All day and all night long, couriers followed couriers, bearing along in cars and on motor-cycles, to the peril of the crowds of fugitives who filled the streets of the town. The arrival of the 1st Army Division, which had been despatched to Ostend on the 3th October to protect the establishment of the army base, roused wonder.

Where did they come from? Some said from Namur, others from Antwerp. None knew for certain. A feeling of dread anxiety swept over the populace. For several days the Ostend-Dover steamer service had been taking loads of Belgian refugees to England.

The Queen came to Ostend from Antwerp; the King, who had followed his troops, was to be seen walking in the early morning, deep in thought, among the sand dunes.

On the evening of the 12th the public learned that the Government was to take up its residence in France, at Havre. There was a wild rush to the landing-stage. Heaps of luggage choked up the approaches as far as the inner quay of the canal. Hundreds of persons spent the night huddled among vehicles and baggage. The excitement was unparalleled. Before daybreak on Tuesday the 3th October, the crowds collected before the station doors. There were women of all classes, of all types, with babies in their arms, crying with the cold; wounded soldiers, their heads wrapped in blood-stained bandages, their faces covered with shaggy beards, their uniforms in rags, supporting themselves on sticks; gendarmes, cyclists, soldiers of all arms of the service, who were to embark for France or England and then join their regiments again *via* Calais.

Now the official personages appeared.<sup>2</sup> Motors and carriages succeeded one another at a frantic pace, which increased the nervous tension of the crowd, and deposited their freight, the Ministers and their families and the officials and their belongings, who embarked respectively in the boats *Pieter De Connick* and *Stad Antwerpen*.

Before leaving Ostend the Belgian Government had issued the following proclamation:—

FELLOW CITIZENS,

For nearly two months and a half the soldiers of Belgium have defended the soil of the Fatherland, step by step, at the cost of heroic sacrifices. The enemy counted on annihilating our army at Antwerp. But a retreat in

<sup>1</sup> See the correspondence on this point in *La neutralité de la Belgique* (official publication), pp. 161-3.

<sup>2</sup> See the article "Il y a un an," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 13th October 1915.

faultless order and dignity has frustrated this hope, and assured us the preservation of our armed forces, which will continue to fight, without respite, for the noblest and justest of causes.

From henceforth these forces will carry on operations on our southern frontier supported by our Allies. With their brave help it is certain that right will triumph.

Yet another sacrifice is now to be added to those which our people have borne with a courage only equalled by their misfortunes! Unless the designs of the invader are to be served by the Government, it is forced to take up its seat in a place where it is unable to continue in touch with our own forces and with the armies of France and Britain. Only thus can the Government continue to exercise and preserve our national independence as a sovereign State.

For this reason the Government is leaving Ostend to-day, with a warm and grateful recollection of the loyal welcome with which it was received in this city. The seat of Government will be provisionally installed at Havre, where the generous friendship of the Government of the French Republic assures full sovereign rights and free exercise of our authority and functions.

Fellow-Citizens,

This temporary trial to which our patriotism must submit to-day will, we are convinced, ensure full reparation soon. The Belgian public services will be carried out as fully as circumstances permit. The King and the Government rely upon your wisdom and your patriotism. You may, on your side, count upon our fervent devotion, on the valour of our army and the co-operation of our Allies in hastening the hour of our common deliverance.

Our dear country, odiously betrayed and ill-used by one of the Powers which swore to guarantee her neutrality, excites an increasing admiration throughout the world.

Thanks to the unity, courage, and foresight of all her children, Belgium will remain worthy of this homage, which consoles her to-day. To-morrow she will emerge from her ordeal, greater and fairer than ever, having suffered for Justice and for the honour of Civilization itself.

Long live free and independent Belgium!

OSTEND, 13th October 1914.<sup>1</sup>

After waiting three mortally long hours, the two steamboats which carried the members of the Government weighed anchor. Their place at the quay was immediately taken by the *Marie Henriette*, for which there was a horrible rush and a real struggle, only restrained by the coolness of a British soldier, who barred the bridge leading on to the boat with his rifle and somewhat controlled the crowd. Presently the old packet was full to overflowing.

Suddenly cries of horror arose. From the sky came the sinister rhythmic hum of a motor-engine, and from the wharves the popping rifle fire. A Taube was hovering over the boat. The women crossed themselves or hid their faces. The enemy airman dropped a bomb which was obviously aimed at the vessel. Fortunately the infernal machine fell into the waters of the harbour. Finally the *Marie Henriette* started on her voyage. Then two more steamers left, and countless fishing-boats and sailing boats carried thousands of people to the shores of England or of France.

Other crowds took their departure in electric trams, in carts, and on foot in the direction of La Panne or Knocke. It was the civilian retreat—more pitiful and heartrending even than the other!

On the same day at dawn the King had left Ostend. He was on horseback; he took the road by the shore, accompanied by a few officers, acknowledging salutes with a forced smile more painful than tears.

<sup>1</sup> We have quoted the text of this proclamation from *La neutralité de la Belgique*, pp. 157-9.

But on the morrow those who saw him on the dyke at Nieuport bear witness that all signs of depression had vanished from his face and manner. Albert I faced the future with composure and unflinching eyes. His manner was decided and firm. The soldiers had thrilled to the virile note of his order: "Consider that man a traitor to our country who speaks of retreat unless a formal order has been given."

The Battle of the Yser was now to begin.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE BATTLE OF THE YSER<sup>1</sup>

THE sanguinary battle which was about to be fought on the banks of the little river of Flanders is only one episode of the gigantic contest in which the Germans and the Allies were engaged on the left section of the immense line of fighting. To appreciate the real value of the defence of the Yser by the Belgians, it is essential to consider the importance of the position which they had to defend against innumerable hordes.

We have already stated that, after the struggle on the Aisne, each of the opposing forces had attempted to turn the western extremity of the battle-line, and that these different movements led to a rapid and progressive extension of the front towards the sea.

At the beginning of October the Allies, believing that they might regain the offensive, conceived the plan of extending their left wing so as to hold the line of the Scheldt from Tournai to Antwerp—their front running south-west from Tournai by way of Douai and Arras. Then, with Arras as a base, they would move forward beyond the Scheldt against the German communications by Mons and Valenciennes. This plan assumed that the fortress of Antwerp would be able to withstand all attacks.<sup>2</sup>

On the 9th October it became obvious that Antwerp, in spite of all illusions, must fall.

Abandoning the first plan of campaign, the Allies adopted a second, which involved the occupation of Lille and La Bassée as bases.<sup>3</sup> According to this plan the English, with La Bassée as pivot, would turn in a south-easterly direction, isolate on one side the army of Von Beseler which was advancing in Flanders, and on the other threaten the north-west communications of the German front. But the Germans took Lille and La Bassée and rendered impossible the execution of the second scheme.<sup>4</sup>

A third plan then suggested itself. Instead of a frontal attack, an enveloping movement against the right flank of the German armies

<sup>1</sup> Special accounts devoted to the Battle of the Yser are: Ronse, *De Slag by den Yser*; F. Hubert, "La Bataille de l'Yser," in the issue of the *Correspondant* of 10th July 1915; P. Nothomb, "La Bataille de l'Yser," in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for 15th September 1915; E. Van der Velde, "La Bataille de l'Yser," in the *Nineteenth Century* for March 1916. To these may be added: "La Bataille de l'Yser," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* of 1st December 1914; Captain Marsilly, "L'anniversaire de la Bataille de l'Yser," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of 21st October 1915; Ch. le Goffic, *Dixmude. Un chapitre de l'histoire des fusiliers marins*, Paris, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. iv. pp. 13–15; Winston Churchill, *Antwerp: the story of its siege and fall*, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. pp. 21 et seq.

operating in France might be attempted. For this the town of Menin on the Lys, to the south-east of Ypres, would serve as a pivot.<sup>1</sup> On the 19th October the English tried to take Menin, but, before they had received the reinforcements necessary for the success of this operation the arrival of enormous masses of Germans coming from the direction of Courtrai, and belonging to the newly formed corps which had left Germany on the 11th October, forced them to stop their advance and shortly afterwards to entrench themselves to the east of the Gheluvelt cross-road.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the three plans for the Allies' offensive failed one after the other. The Germans had from the commencement divined their plans and decided to oppose a counter-offensive intended to give them Calais and the Channel ports and lead them into the valley of the Seine for a new attack on Paris.<sup>3</sup>

About the 15th October the French front was solidly organized as far as La Bassée. Fortunately, the Allies had, on the 17th October, succeeded in forming a front which closed the way to the Channel ports between Arras and Nieuport.

The Belgian army, to which the brigade of French marine fusiliers was attached, was to hold the Yser from the sea to Zuidschote. The English troops were to take up a position before Ypres.

Reinforcements soon came to complete these positions. A cavalry corps and the 2nd and 3rd English Army Corps arrived at St. Omer and were to occupy the line from the outskirts of La Bassée up to the positions of the 7th English Division round Ypres. Two French territorial divisions were also advancing towards Ypres. The English front by Ypres, on the line Zandvoorde-Gheluvelt-Zonnebeke, was joined up with the Belgians by detachments of French and British cavalry.

The barrier between La Bassée and Nieuport was completed about the 17th October, and the Allies thenceforward had a continuous front and, for the first time since the war began, were able to engage in action in common.<sup>4</sup>

This front was in reality not secure, if regard be had to the masses of Germans that were concentrating from the Lys to the sea and were to attempt to pierce the line of their adversaries. Consequently French and English reinforcements were got ready to consolidate the line of the Allies north of the Lys, but several days must elapse before this help arrived. It was therefore necessary to resist to the last, so as to give those reinforcements time to occupy their designated positions.

The plan of the Germans was soon revealed. There were three ways by which they might reach the shores of the Channel, and access to them could be gained by breaking the Allies' front at well-chosen points. The first of these points was Arras. There the railway lines from Western Flanders and North-western France met, and from there railways ran to Amiens, Boulogne, Lens, and Béthune.

The second point was at La Bassée, whence a railway led directly through Béthune and St. Omer to Calais and Boulogne.

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* iv. pp. 37-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 70-2; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 115-16.



A third way was along the coast by Nieuport over the dunes.<sup>1</sup>

It was at four points—Arras, La Bassée, and on the Yser and near Ypres—that the Germans were about to deliver violent attacks in order to clear a road towards the objective they coveted so much. These attacks were made simultaneously: on the Yser, from 16th to 31st October; at Ypres, from 20th October to 17th November; at La Bassée, from 22nd October to 2nd November; and at Arras, from 20th to 26th October.<sup>2</sup> It was by the Yser and in the neighbourhood of Ypres that the longest and bloodiest contest took place, and to the Belgian and the British forces fell the honour of breaking at that point the formidable onslaught of the enemy.

The mission entrusted to the Belgian army was simple. It had to break the first shock of the enemy, hold him, and at all costs prevent him from crossing the Yser before the arrival of the reinforcements which were on the way.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of this theoretical simplicity, the task which fell to the lot of the Belgians was nevertheless extremely heavy. They had hardly left the horrors of the bombardment of Antwerp and made a perilous retreat amid a thousand difficulties. For two and a half months they had been continually fighting, and had suffered heavy losses. The army numbered only 70,000 to 80,000 men, and the combatant effectives were no more than 48,000 bayonets.<sup>4</sup>

In most of the mixed brigades the regiments were reduced to three battalions. The troops needed rest to recuperate and to reorganize themselves to some extent. Field-Marshal French says in his despatches that they had reached "the last stage of exhaustion."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the enemy they had to fight had a crushing superiority in numbers. Between the sea and the Lys the 4th German Army was advancing, commanded by the Duke of Württemberg. It included a part of Von Beseler's army which had become available by the fall of Antwerp, including the 3rd Reserve Army Corps, the 4th Reserve Division, the 37th Landwehr Brigade. To these must be added the units of the new formations that we have mentioned—the 22nd, 23rd, 26th, and 27th Reserve Army Corps. The total amounted to some 140 battalions, supported by over 500 guns.<sup>6</sup> At the commencement, 100,000 men and 350 guns were sent against the Belgian positions.<sup>7</sup>

The French High Command asked the Belgians to hold out for forty-eight hours, thinking that that was asking much from these fatigued units.<sup>8</sup> As the King had said in his Proclamation of 13th October, national honour was at stake. They must hold out, no matter what the cost. It was necessary to hold on to the last strip of the country with the fierce energy of despair.

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, *op. cit.* iv. pp. 51 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Compare *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 69; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 116; and W. Breton, *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, p. 29, whose estimates vary from 32,000 to 70,000 men. The figure of 48,000 bayonets is certain.

<sup>5</sup> "The troops, although in the last stage of exhaustion" (despatch of Field-Marshal French to the War Office, 20th November 1914, published in J. Buchan, *op. cit.* iv., Appendix I at p. 240).

<sup>6</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 72.

"Suddenly," says Commandant Marsilly,<sup>1</sup> "as if by magic, a determined resolution to struggle to the end drove away the passing discouragement of the already forgotten hours of gloom. The army in tatters drew itself up confidently and almost joyfully, curiously equipped with everything that clever ingenuity had collected to remedy a lamentable destitution. With miserable accoutrements, provided with strange tools of every conceivable sort, under the rain and in the sticky mud our soldiers ranged up along the Yser." They made no calculation. What was the good? They would hold out; they would allow themselves to be killed in their places, that was all. The more German came, the more they would kill. There was nothing left but to conquer or to die: if one must die, then death would come on the last strip of Belgian land, in the familiar scenes of the Flemish country-side which the battle was soon to change into a land of desolation.

The ground occupied by the Belgians was none of the best, in spite of the defensive value of the waterways.<sup>2</sup> The district forms a low-lying plain, without any apparent undulations; it is the extensive and very bare pasture-land of Veurne-Ambacht. The fields are marked off by ditches, mostly full of water. Trees are scarce, except the lines planted alongside the main roads. Here and there are willows by the ditches, and apple-trees round the isolated farms scattered through the district. These farms are very numerous. With the small groups of houses round the village churches, they form the only cover in this country.

There are few roads and ways through this wide, low-lying plain and movement is rendered difficult by a very complicated system of canalized streams and waterways: the Koolhofvaart; the Noordvaart or Groote Beverdyk; the Kleine Beverdyk or Reigervliet; the Oostkerkevaart and the Bertegatvaart. These waterways are only passable by means of footbridges. A little stream, the Yser, winds through the district from north to south and then turns westwards. The Yser has a width of about 20 yards. It is embanked. The embankments throughout this flat region are raised about 6 to 9 feet. Near Dixmude the right bank of the Yser dominates the left bank. The almost uniform height of this latter bank is 9 feet; the right bank attains 30 feet by Beerst and 105 and even 125 feet near Clercken.

About 10 kilometres to the rear of the Yser the canal from Loe to Furnes, larger still and embanked, constitutes a second line of defence, having an appreciable defensive value,

Land of this character offers little shelter: apart from the farms and the little groups of houses, the embankment of the railway joining Nieuport to Dixmude and running parallel to the Yser was the only feature offering a position for retreat. This only reached a height of 3 to 6 feet. The absence of woods and coppices rendered it easy for the enemy aviators to make observations, and the position of the batteries was very easy to discover.

As for entrenchments, as soon as the soil was dug to any extent

<sup>1</sup> "L'anniversaire de la Bataille de l'Yser," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* for 21st October 1915.

<sup>2</sup> For our description of the ground we have followed *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 72-3; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 116-17; W. Breton, *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, pp. 26-9.

water appeared. It filtered through everywhere as soon as the soil was disturbed. The Belgians had to fight in sticky mud.

The villages scattered about afforded easy targets for the enemy guns. The trenches on the Yser, with their raised parapet, were rapidly discovered and kept under fire. To hide the artillery there was nothing save orchards, hedges, and a few screens of trees.

The Yser itself, which marks the line of defence, is only a feeble obstacle, and its value is still further diminished by the dangerous windings of its bed. In its general formation the river forms an arc of a circle curving out towards the enemy, the chord of which is constituted by the Nieuport-Dixmude railway. These two places, each situated at one end of the arc, are the keystones of the defence. If the enemy captured them and debouched thence on the left bank of the Yser, the whole river front would fall, and even the railway embankment could not be used as a second line of defence.

Nor is that all. The course of the Yser presents salients and re-entrants which must assist hostile attacks. The most dangerous of these is the bend of Tervaete, with its curve towards the east. Other points for crossings existed at St.-Georges, Schoorbakke, and Stuyvekenskerke.

In view of these weak points of the position to be held at all costs, the Belgian High Command formed the following plan of battle:—There must be formed at Nieuport and Dixmude solid bridgeheads which must be defended to the death. If it became a question of not confining the defence to passive resistance but also of manœuvring, the counter-attacks would have to debouch from these. It was necessary also to keep the enemy as far as possible away from these critical points in the lines of defence. That brought about the necessity of occupying a position in front of the Yser capable of delaying the onset of the Germans for the longest possible time. This advanced line would be formed by a series of points: Lombartzyde, Groote-Bamburgh farm, Mannekensvere, Schoore, Keyem, Beerst, Vladsloo, and Eessen.

If this advanced line were carried, and the line of the Yser itself forced, it would be necessary to defend to the last the ground behind it, notably on the Noordvaart and Beverdyk. If, unfortunately, resistance there should also fail, there still remained for a fight to the last breath the Nieuport-Dixmude railway embankment.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the plan of battle. The dispositions taken were as follows<sup>2</sup>:—At first the Belgian army was asked to occupy the threatened front from the sea as far as Boesinghe. The 2nd Division had to defend the ground from the sea to some distance beyond the Pont de l'Union, to occupy Lombartzyde and Mannekensvere, and hold the bridgehead in front of Nieuport, so as to remain masters of the bridges and locks. At Nieuport six canals and waterways join—the Furnes canal, the Noordvaart, the canalized Yser, the old Yser, the Plasschendaële canal, and the flood canal. At high tide sea-water could be let into these canals and waterways through a system of locks.

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 26-8; Commandant Marsilly, "L'anniversaire de la Bataille de l'Yser."

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 73-4; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 117-18; W. Breton, op. cit.

The 1st Division had to defend the ground from near the Pont de l'Union up to the middle of the Tervaete bend, together with the bridgehead at Schoorbakke and the advanced post at Schoore.

The 4th Division stretched from below Tervaete as far as the height of the Den Torren farm, with advanced posts at Keyem and Beerst.

The French marine fusiliers, the 11th and 12th Line Regiments, and two artillery groups of the 3rd Division prolonged the line of the 4th Division and occupied a bridgehead in front of Dixmude, covering the Dixmude-Nieuport and Dixmude-Furnes railways. By these lines traffic from the former base of Ostend to France was carried on.

The 5th Division was echeloned from St.-Jacques-Cappelle to Driegrachten, with a bridgehead at Luyghem. The 6th Division ended the front by Merckem and Boesinghe, joining up with the French territorials at the last-named place.

The 1st Cavalry Division was to the south of the Forest of Houthulst, covering the right flank of the army and operating with the French cavalry in the direction of Roulers.

From Nieuport-Bains to Boesinghe formed a front of 36 kilometres, and almost the whole of the Belgian forces were placed along it. The sole reserve at the disposal of the High Command was the 2nd Cavalry Division, posted between Nieuport and Furnes, and two brigades of the 3rd Division near Lampernisse.

These dispositions, which were imposed by circumstances, made the Belgian front so fragile that an attack of no great violence might easily make a breach in it. Fortunately, the Allied reinforcements arrived before the enemy was able to act. During the 15th October it thus became possible to recall the 6th Division from its positions on the Yperlée and place it in general reserve. It could then interpose from its position near Lampernisse by detachments at the different points which might be particularly threatened. Other reserves could also be formed, near Wulpen by the forces of the 3rd Division, and near Oostkerke by the main body of the 5th Division. Under these conditions the Belgian front was less extended and became stronger, so that when on the 18th the real battle began, they felt able to breathe more freely.

We have seen above that the German forces marching towards the Yser presented on the 14th October a front stretching from Bruges to Iseghem. On the 15th they appeared on the line Ghisteltes-Ichteghem-Cortemarck-Staden-Roulers.<sup>1</sup>

On the afternoon of that day information received as to the enemy's movements foreshadowed an immediate attack on the Dixmude-Nieuport front.<sup>2</sup>

With the Germans time pressed. It was necessary to fall on the Belgian line at once and break it before reinforcements arrived, and especially to bring pressure on the two extremities of the arc formed by the Yser. It was especially necessary to bring the utmost pressure to bear against Dixmude. Here there was no hindrance from the obstacle of the coast, and if this point could be pierced, the Belgian army would be cut off from its Allies, forced into the sea, and either captured or annihilated.

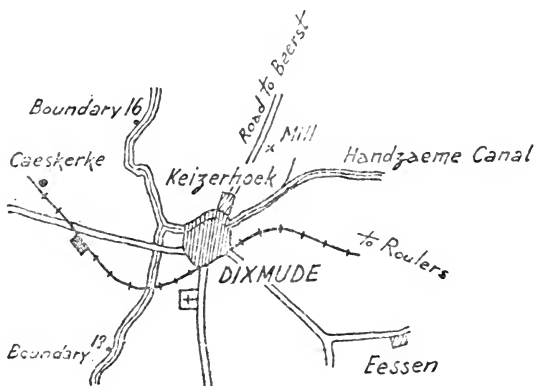
<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 74.

On the 16th October the enemy cannon was heard for the first time and the battle began. As Commandant Breton remarks, "The Yser was about to attain immortality."<sup>1</sup>

The struggle began at the advanced positions of the Belgians in front of the Yser. The enemy began by feeling the Belgian positions. The first contact was established between the German patrols and the cavalry of the 1st Division at St.-Pierre-Cappelle, to the east of the Yser. The latter made several prisoners.<sup>2</sup> In the afternoon the Germans made a reconnaissance in force towards Dixmude.

Here the French marine fusiliers, who had arrived on the 13th October, had been set, with the assistance of some Belgian pioneers, to organize the bridgehead which they had been told to hold at all costs. The position chosen by Admiral Ronarc'h surrounded the town like the arc of a circle, starting from the mill on the Beerst road, crossing the Handzaeme canal, the Dixmude-Roulers railway, and the Eessen road, and ending on the main road from Ypres south of the cemetery. On the south of the town trenches following



the course of the railway joined up with the position on the Yser, whilst on the north the circle was completed by trenches running east to west between the hamlet of Keizerhoek and the river. On the west bank of the Yser the embankment had been organized from the boundary 16 to the boundary 19.5. A position for retirement was constituted by the farms, put into a state of defence, on both sides of the Caeskerke halt, and trenches, from whence the two bridges by which the main road and the railway to Nieuport crossed the Yser could be bombarded.<sup>3</sup>

Having neither the time nor the materials, the marine fusiliers were unable to construct subsidiary defence works in front of the trenches. The latter were hardly begun when the Germans appeared before the positions.

An intercepted German wireless message had revealed the enemy's objective, the making of a reconnaissance in force towards Dixmude.

<sup>1</sup> *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, *Les pages de gloire de l'armée belge*, pp. 76-8.

He desired to learn the manner in which the Yser was occupied, particularly at the all-important point at the extreme right of the defence.

At the moment of attack, the marine fusiliers, who were known to be without artillery, had with them a Belgian artillery group, made up of the 31st, 32nd, and 33rd batteries, under Major Pontus. This group was to form an integral part of the French brigade until the 8th November. The three batteries were stationed to the west of Caeskerke on the Nieuport road.

The German attack was preceded by the fire of field artillery, which only caused the marines slight losses. The German battalions then advanced in close formation. They were met by heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, in which the Belgian batteries joined. The forward movement of the enemy was stopped dead. However, the German officers urged on their men, forcing them to advance. In this way some got quite near the French trenches, but were immediately decimated.

Seeing that Dixmude was strongly held, the Germans desisted and retired at nightfall, leaving a number of dead and wounded on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime the Belgian General Staff had sent considerable reinforcements to Admiral Ronarc'h. The six divisional batteries of the 3rd Division under Colonel de Vleeschhouwer came up at a gallop to join the marines. They were, in combination with the batteries of Major Pontus's group, to keep under their fire all the approaches to Dixmude—to the north and south and in the direction of Eessen.<sup>2</sup>

On the same night of the 16th October contact was established at another point on the front. The cyclist company of the 16th Brigade, posted as an outpost near the Forest of Houthulst, was attacked by a German motor machine gun. Being met by a fusillade, the enemy machine turned round and disappeared into the night.

On the 17th October strong enemy columns were seen on the march towards the Yser. They came along the Plasschendaele canal from Leffinghe towards Slype, and from Ghisteltes towards Zevecote. An attack was launched on Rattevalle. This hamlet was bombarded and soon caught fire. Further away a small engagement took place between the cyclist company of the 2nd Division and a detachment of enemy cyclists. The latter retired with some loss. Towards mid-day the outpost established at Mannekensvere sent word that enemy troops coming from Slype were marching on St.-Pierre-Cappelle. A detachment of Belgian cavalry and cyclists with two motor machine guns went to the village and drove out the enemy. The latter replied shortly afterwards by shelling the place.<sup>3</sup>

The 27th battery, belonging to the artillery of the 7th mixed brigade, on its way to take up a position between Ramscappelle and St.-Georges near the trenches along the Yser held by the 7th Line Regiment, was heavily shelled on the march by the enemy artillery, and only managed to occupy its new position by bringing up a gun at a time. The other two batteries of the group succeeded in silencing the German guns.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 30, 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>3</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 121; W. Breton, op. cit. p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. p. 43.

To the south of the Yser front other German columns were marching from Staden on Zarren. To cover the right of the army against surprise, the 4th and 7th French Cavalry Divisions, turning by the north of the Forest of Houthulst, drove out of this region the advanced parties of the enemy. The 1st Belgian Cavalry Division supported them on the right, and about 10 a.m. vigorously shelled an enemy column debouching from Staden. The fire of the German howitzers, which at once opened fire, forced the Belgian cavalry to withdraw to the eastern edge of the Forest of Houthulst.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the threat against the Dixmude-Nieuport front, the 5th Division left its position on the Yperlée and was placed in the second line near Lampernisse, the 3rd Division moving up from Lampernisse to Avecappelle. The gap left open by the departure of the 5th Division was filled by a brigade detached from the 6th Division near Noordschoote.<sup>2</sup>

Reconnaissance and establishment of contact was continued by the Germans throughout the day along the whole front. The shells of the enemy's field artillery searched all the advanced positions. Almost everywhere detachments of German infantry pushed forward, but were at once stopped dead by vigorous fire.<sup>3</sup>

The Germans now had gained the necessary information. The Belgian army, doubtless worn out, had nevertheless not abandoned all idea of resistance, and even seemed to be solidly organized. There was, therefore, no time to lose if they were to be overthrown before the arrival of reinforcements.

In order to facilitate their approach to Nieuport and Dixmude, the two corner-stones of the defences of the Yser, the Germans were about to launch violent attacks on the Belgian advanced line, to try to throw into the Yser the troops holding it.

On the 18th October the real battle began.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing happened that day on the side of Dixmude, but violent attacks were delivered against the whole of the rest of the front. Numerous masses assaulted Lombartzyde, Mannekensvere, Schoore, Keyem, Beerst, and Vladsloo. A heavy bombardment had plastered with shells all these places since the early hours of the morning.

At Lombartzyde, the 5th Line Regiment was furiously attacked by the troops of the 4th Reserve Division. It resisted valiantly, but it is impossible to say whether it would have been able to hold out against the innumerable grey masses who were coming on in waves, but for the unexpected help which came from the sea. At the height of the attack the Germans were enfiladed by a heavy fire, the source of which they were at first unable to guess. Imagine their stupefaction when they saw, not far from the coast and enveloped in mist, the menacing shapes of English warships.

It was a monitor flotilla under the command of Rear-Admiral Hood, who had the Dover patrol under his orders. These ships, the monitors *Humber*, *Severn*, and *Mersey*, were heavily protected and carried two 15-cm. guns in their fore turret and two howitzers of smaller calibre in

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> For the fighting on the 18th see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 75; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 122; W. Breton, *op. cit.* p. 31.

the after one, and their armament was completed by four guns in the waist of the ship. Their draught of water was so small that they moved easily where any other vessel would run aground. As soon as they heard of the German advance along the coast, the British Admiralty ordered the monitors to sail, and they left Dover in the evening of the 17th October.

Thus the attack on Lombartzyde had scarcely begun before shells of large calibre, fired with admirable precision by the English sailors, burst in the ranks and on the positions of the bewildered Germans.<sup>1</sup>

Overwhelmed by this unforeseen attack, they were unable to press home their movement against Lombartzyde, which remained in the hands of the Belgians. They had more success at the advanced post of Mannekensvere. At daybreak the first threat was made in this region near the Plasschendaele canal. The small detached posts of the 6th Line Regiment near Rattevalle were obliged to retire before superior forces.

White cloudlets of shrapnel soon appeared over Mannekensvere and to the north of the village, while the 77-mm. shells searched the ground. The outposts were gradually driven back, until at 11.15 a.m. the detachment occupying Mannekensvere was attacked in its turn. It was obliged to retire on the Pont de l'Union under the protection of the 7th Line Regiment, posted in its neighbourhood. A little further south, the outpost established at Spermalie by the 1st Division was also attacked.

Though the grey battalions had managed this affair vigorously, the Belgians were determined to stop their advance at all costs. From the trenches of the 7th Line Regiment above and below the Pont de l'Union a continuous fusillade was kept up. The machine guns posted on the bridge itself opened fire on the German skirmishers at 900 yards. The artillery of the 7th mixed brigade, supporting the 7th Regiment, fired unceasingly on the enemy troops who had entered Mannekensvere or who showed themselves to the north of the village. The adversary was pinned to his ground and forced to take cover.

The German artillery at once came to his assistance. About mid-day, the trenches dug in the Yser embankment received their first shells. St.-Georges was bombarded and a rain of fire was directed at the positions of the Belgian batteries. The latter, nevertheless, continued their work, and the German columns attempting to debouch from Mannekensvere were seen to re-enter hurriedly.

Encouraged by this success, the 26th battery changed its position with reckless courage, and bravely took its stand in a field almost entirely deprived of cover. The position was dangerous, and it was difficult to bring up ammunition across the open space. Nevertheless the gunners kept up a long and vigorous rain of shrapnel and shells bursting over Mannekensvere.

The fire of this battery thus prepared an attack by two companies of the 3rd battalion of the 7th Regiment, aided by machine guns, with a view to retaking the lost village.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. iv. pp. 61-2; report of the British Admiralty issued on 23rd October (see *The Times* of 23rd October 1914). The Allied Commanders had asked for the assistance of the British ships.

<sup>2</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 44-5.



Under Major Evrard, the attacking party crossed the Pont de l'Union and deployed a little before 6 p.m. The enemy perceived the movement. He vigorously sprinkled with shells the space over which the charge had to be made, and the outskirts of the village were filled with German riflemen ready to repel the attack. The progress of the Belgians accordingly was slow. It was 11 p.m. before Evrard's detachment was able to plant itself to the west of the village and in its outlying houses. Content with this success, the Belgians postponed the resumption of the attack until the dawn. The darkness of the night and the ground, which was damp and muddy and cut up by ditches, rendered prudence necessary: moreover, ammunition was nearly, if not quite, exhausted, and a fresh supply could be better brought up under cover of darkness. The night passed in immediate contact with the enemy.<sup>1</sup>

The Germans, by continually throwing new troops into the fight, had succeeded in occupying Mannekenvere. The same tactics gave them possession of the advanced position of Schoore. Here four hours' bombardment overwhelmed the defence, which could not prevent the capture of the village by an advanced guard of the 3rd Reserve Corps. As soon as the place had fallen into the enemy's hands, it was, like Mannekenvere, violently shelled by the Belgian batteries posted on the left bank of the Yser. Here, also, the attackers were pinned down and unable to advance from the houses. The men of the 1st Division attempted by a vigorous attack to dislodge the enemy, but met with invincible resistance. Schoore remained in the hands of the Germans.

Still further south, Keyem was also taken by a violent assault. The outposts of the 10th Line Regiment were obliged to retire on Kasteelhoek under the pressure of troops belonging to the 6th Reserve Division. But they were able to maintain themselves on the right bank of the Yser. This was fortunate, as they thereby covered the access to the Tervaele bend, one of the most dangerous positions on the Belgian front. The batteries on the left bank kept up an unceasing fire on Keyem and held the enemy there. In the meantime reinforcements came up and the commander of the 10th Line Regiment prepared a vigorous counter-attack. This was delivered at night. With superb *élan* the troops rushed forward, and succeeded in retaking the outer part of the village.

All attacks launched by the enemy against the advanced position of Beerst utterly failed. During their progress, Admiral Ronarc'h, about 2 p.m., informed Colonel de Vleeschouwer, commanding the Belgian batteries at Dixmude, that the Germans were attacking Keyem and Beerst and occupying Vladslloo. He himself sent a battalion of marines, with some Belgian motor machine guns, to make a reconnaissance towards Eessen, and he ordered a battery to be established between Eessen and Dixmude so as to bombard Vladslloo and the eastern parts of Beerst. The 50th battery was entrusted with this task. As soon as the French reconnaissance was completed, and an attack on that column was no longer to be feared, the 50th battery rejoined its group at St.-Jacques-Cappelle, where the latter had been transferred in the meantime.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 44-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

The Germans must have been disagreeably surprised at the tenacity displayed by the Belgians during the 18th October. Nowhere had they been able to debouch from the points captured, by reason of the violent bombardment directed at them from the left bank of the Yser; and the valour of the Belgians was proved by the fact that scarcely had they been repulsed at any point before they at once made vigorous counter-attacks.

The Belgian High Command was, nevertheless, under no mistake as to the gravity of the situation, and took steps to reinforce the line of the Yser. The 6th Division in its turn was recalled to the north. Its presence at Boesinghe and Noordschoote was no longer required, as large bodies of Anglo-French cavalry were operating in the direction of Roulers, and afforded sufficient protection for the right wing of the army. The forces of the second or reserve line were regrouped. The 3rd Division was transferred from Avecapelle to Wulpen, the 5th took up a position near Oostkerke and the 6th replaced the last-named division near Lampernisse. The 1st Cavalry Division received orders to keep in the closest touch with the right of the army, though still working with the French cavalry.<sup>1</sup>

It was with their front thus reinforced that the Belgians saw dawn break on the 19th October.<sup>2</sup>

Evrard's detachment immediately resumed its offensive against Mannekensvere. From the start Major Evrard perceived that the Germans had received reinforcements of men and machine guns. They made a vigorous defence. Moreover, since dawn an intense bombardment of the Pont de l'Union, St.-Georges, and the Yser trenches had rendered it difficult to send reinforcements from the side of the Belgians. And yet the detachment operating against Mannekensvere had need of them.

In spite of the enemy's vigorous fire, a reinforcing company at 9 a.m. rushed across the Pont de l'Union. A storm of shrapnel burst round it and scattered it. Its commander, Captain Dunglehoef, fell dead.

The men hesitated and fell back, but the officers vigorously urged them on, and, running from ditch to ditch, they made progress. The fire of the Germans became more and more terrible. If it was not to be decimated, the reinforcement would have to abandon its task of joining Evrard.

The latter, almost without ammunition, could no longer continue to cling to the outskirts of Mannekensvere. Overwhelmed by superior forces, Major Evrard was reluctantly compelled to order a retreat.

This was executed in perfect order. Retiring from cover to cover, the men stopped every moment to fire at the enemy until they had fired off their last remaining cartridges. The detachment was barely 800 yards from the Pont de l'Union, and yet the Belgians took an hour and a half to cover the distance. They took advantage of every bit of cover to inflict on the enemy as heavy losses as possible. Major Evrard, though severely wounded in the shoulder was the last to cross the bridge.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> For the events of the 19th see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 75-6; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 123-5; W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 31-3.

During the retirement the Belgian artillery had continued to support the detachment by rapid fire. They were themselves subjected to an energetic counter-bombardment. They received bloody losses from a murderous fire from six 7·7-mm. guns, and then from a cross-fire of a battery of 13·5-mm. guns. The men serving the little Belgian spit-fire pieces stuck doggedly to their task, and prevented the Germans from debouching from Mannekensvere. As on the day before, the enemy were pinned to their ground.<sup>1</sup>

During the 19th however, the German attack was intensified along the whole front. A great effort was made against the advanced positions at Nieuport. German assaults beat furiously against the defences of Lombartzyde, where the men of the 2nd Division displayed the same fierce resistance as on the previous day.

The English squadron again rendered great assistance to the Belgians. The heavy guns of the monitors caused serious losses in the ranks of the Germans. The monitors were no longer alone; they were joined by other ships of an old type, for the British Admiralty had no intention of risking new units in these shallow waters. There was the old cruiser *Brilliant*, the gunboat *Rinaldo*, and several destroyers, including the *Falcon*. A French flotilla under Captain Richard, of the *Dunois*, also took part in the action. The fire of these vessels enfiladed the German trenches and the columns operating against Lombartzyde.

The Germans established batteries on the seashore, but the Allied vessels were out of range and the guns of the monitors destroyed several of the guns directed against them.<sup>2</sup>

At Lombartzyde the Belgians seemed to be riveted to the ground. Though the Germans had brought up heavy guns, whose shells began to fall thick and fast, the men of the 2nd Division, with the effective aid of the artillery, which everywhere did marvels, repulsed three successive assaults.

By way of reprisal the Germans shelled Nieuport vigorously with their heavy artillery. The latter came into full action in the afternoon, and an infernal tempest raged, shaking the earth and filling the whole sector with acrid, suffocating fumes. Besides Nieuport, the chief targets were the Pont de l'Union, the trenches near by, St.-Georges, and the batteries.

In the village the giant projectiles demolished entire blocks of houses like packs of cards; the trenches were shattered, and the men were continually obliged to repair them under this terrible fire. The bombardment lasted until nightfall.<sup>3</sup>

Foreseeing that an infantry attack would follow this avalanche of shells, the small Belgian guns, powerless against guns of large calibre, continued to batter the ground in front of the positions, without the enemy being able to reduce them to silence.

On the front of the 4th Division the enemy succeeded in making disquieting progress. During the night he had been forced from Keyem by a vigorous counter-attack. On the 19th he returned to the charge against Keyem and Beerst at the same time; the latter had still remained in the hands of the Belgians. The battle was keen

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 45-6.

<sup>2</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. pp. 62-3.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 46-7.

at these two points. The presence of his heavy artillery gave the enemy a considerable advantage. By a vigorous bombardment, he succeeded in preparing an attack against the two coveted posts without the small Belgian guns being able to make effective reply. Overwhelmed by a torrent of fire, the defenders of Beerst at last had to retire. Keyem was again captured during the morning. Here the 13th Line Regiment advanced for a counter-attack, but was taken in flank and forced back by German reinforcements hurried up from Hoogveld.

The pressure upon the front of the 4th Division exposed it to the risk of being overcome if no effective assistance arrived. Since 7 a.m. Admiral Ronarc'h had known from the formidable gunfire that battle was raging to the north of Dixmude. As the Germans in front of the positions held by the marines remained almost inactive, the admiral decided to relieve the 4th Division by pushing an attack towards Eessen, with an advance guard towards Vladsloo. The first artillery group of the 3rd Belgian Division was to support this movement of the marines from a position which they were to take up between Dixmude and Eessen, facing northwards.

At 10 a.m. this artillery opened fire on the outskirts of Praetbosch, which served as a support for the Germans for their attacks on Keyem and Beerst. This intervention was, however, not sufficient to relieve the 4th Division.

The Belgian General Headquarters then ordered a counter-attack to be launched from Dixmude in the direction of Beerst-Vladsloo. In this movement the 17th mixed brigade, belonging to the 5th Belgian Division, was to advance on Vladsloo and Praetbosch and the French marines were to advance on Beerst and Keyem.

This attack would be supported by the fire of all the Belgian batteries near Dixmude

To replace the French marines at the Dixmude bridgehead during the attack, Meiser's brigade (11th and 12th Line Regiments) of the 3rd Division was recalled from its position on the canalized Yser.

When this brigade received the order to leave for Dixmude, it was assembled at Oudecappelle. A picturesque cortège of 1,500 Algerian cavalry was defiling through the streets of the village. Proudly seated on their prancing steeds, the "goumiers" passed along, glittering in their picturesque uniforms. Belgians and "goumiers" greeted each other with repeated cries of "Vive la Belgique!" "Vive la France!" As the cavalry column halted at the end of the village the band of the 11th Line Regiment played the "Marseillaise." Like a flash, the steel of the swords and bayonets shone in the sun, whilst "goumiers" and Belgians remained motionless at attention. As the Belgians were watching with curiosity the Algerian cavalry's preparations for camp, an order arrived. Meiser's brigade was called to Dixmude. It was to leave along the canal as far as Driegrachten two companies to guard the waterway.

In the meantime the offensive from Dixmude of the marines and the men of the 5th Division began under favourable auspices. The whole of the Belgian artillery, four groups in all, acting in unison, covered with shells the Keyem-Beerst-Vladsloo-Praetbosch region, into which the enemy had made an irruption. The Germans suffered

severely. The chasseurs of the 17th Belgian Brigade and the French marines advanced vigorously at the same time, the former towards Vladslloo and the latter towards Beerst. Shortly after midday, the marines obtained a footing in Beerst, which was in flames. The 3rd Chasseurs à pied occupied Vladslloo, whilst the 1st Line Regiment went on towards Bovekerke. Unable to withstand this unexpected attack, at nightfall the Germans were forced to give way. Gaining ground more and more to the north, the Franco-Belgian troops overthrew the elements attempting to oppose their advance, and seriously threatened the enemy's flank. The latter abandoned Keyem and retired slowly towards the woods of Couckelaere and Praetbosch, under the fire of the Belgian batteries.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, at this precise moment strong German columns had debouched from Roulers and were approaching Staden, thus threatening the flank of the Franco-Belgian counter-offensive. They were the heads of column of the 23rd German Reserve Army Corps. A detachment of the 6th Division, consisting of a grenadier battalion and a battery, had a skirmish with them near Staden.<sup>2</sup>

The men of the 5th Division and the marines were therefore obliged to retire by Dixmude to the left bank of the Yser. Under a fine, drenching rain the Belgian chasseurs and the marines regained their quarters, passing through the lines where Meiser's brigade was established. Their retreat through the dark night was lit up by the flames of burning houses near Beerst and Vladslloo. As the men of Meiser's brigade saw them return, worn out and covered with mud and blood, they welcomed them by cheers and shouts of "Vive la France!"<sup>3</sup> Thus was sealed the brotherhood of arms: the 11th and 12th Line Regiments and the marine fusiliers were about to become rivals in courage in their common defence of Dixmude.

The retirement of the counter-attack left the exhausted troops of the 4th Division to their own devices. During the night they were forced to yield up Beerst and Keyem to the Germans; the defenders of those places retired on the Yser.

At this moment the Germans were therefore masters of most of the advanced positions. There were only left to be taken those still held by the 2nd Division on the Lombartzyde-Groote-Bamburgh farm sector and the Dixmude bridgehead.

Against these two extremities of the front the enemy acted with extreme violence during the 20th October.<sup>4</sup> He attempted to take them while the 22nd and 23rd Reserve Army Corps were completing their deployment along the Yser. The day opened with a bombardment of extreme violence, which covered the whole front along the river with shells of all calibres. At 6 a.m. a vigorous attack was launched against Lombartzyde, held by two battalions of the 6th Regiment, resting, on the left, on the sea, and on the right, on Groote-Bamburgh farm. A third battalion joined up this position

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 80-1; Ch. le Goffic, *Dixmude. Un chapitre de l'histoire des fusiliers marins*, Paris, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 81-2.

<sup>4</sup> For the events of the 20th October see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 76; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 125-6; W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 33-6; E. Collin, "Dixmude," in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 245 et seq.

with the 7th Line Regiment, which occupied the Yser embankment to the north of St.-Georges.

The 4th German Reserve Division advanced to the attack, debouching from Westende. It had scarcely appeared before it was vigorously shelled by the guns of the English monitors, the fire of which was directed by naval captive balloons on the coast. The English shells burst on the batteries and heavy guns supporting the attack on Lombartzyde, and, as on the previous day, enfiladed the assailants. The progress of the enemy along the coast was therefore greatly hampered. He then turned his efforts towards Groote-Bamburgh farm and succeeded in establishing himself there, but not for long, as about 9 o'clock a battalion of the 9th Line Regiment, sent by the 3rd Division, which was in reserve, advanced on a counter-attack and brilliantly recaptured the farm. The rest of the action has been described by a witness who saw the battle from the top of a hotel on the beach at Nieuport Bains, and has published a most interesting account in *The Times*<sup>1</sup>:—

When we reached the river<sup>2</sup> at midday fighting was going on between the two villages,<sup>3</sup> and the guns of the warships and the guns of the Belgian field batteries were throwing their shells among the attacking Germans.

All round the horizon on the east of the river houses were burning which had been set alight by their fire. The German guns were replying and endeavouring to reach the Belgian batteries. The shells of the enemy could be seen falling all along the river. The noise was terrific. Every now and then above the thunder of the discharges would come an ear-splitting bang close by, and the black smoke of a bursting German shell would drift across the river, while the surface of the water below was ripped with the exploding fragments. At the end of the nearer of the two wooden piers which run out into the sea from the beach on each side of the mouth of the river stands an old lighthouse. At this the Germans were directing their fire from time to time, believing apparently that it was being used as a signal station. The farther wall of it and the woodwork of the pier were all gashed and splintered by pieces of shell, and here and there was a big hole in the ground. For the most part, however, the shells were falling short just above mid-channel. All along the embankment of the river Belgian infantry were entrenched. They were paying little attention to the German shells. At the moment we arrived many of them were peeling potatoes.

From our post on the roof the whole battle area between Nieuport and the coast was spread out before us, a terrible and wonderful sight. To the left was the sea, with the dark hulls of the warships spitting fire and smoke. Immediately to our right in a little birch wood were the Belgian batteries firing across the river. We could see red flashes from the guns dart through the trees which hid them, and the reports would come crashing out, to shake the house to its foundations. Partially hidden by the dunes and banks which curve round from the coast is Westende.

Westende as we now see it is a perfect hell of fire and smoke. The Germans captured it in the morning, and since then cruisers and destroyers have been firing shell after shell into it and beyond. Through our glasses we can see that some of the nearer buildings are roofless already; an angry fringe of little red tongues flickers round the gables. In the background of drifting smoke the dark forms of the church tower and the windmill stand up half veiled amid the ruin. Between Westende and Lombartzyde all the sky is flecked with bursting shells. That is where the fighting is going on. The white balls which burst in clusters are the shrapnel from the Belgian guns which are roaring from among the trees close by us. Now and again a great splash of black smoke spirts up among the houses. Each of these splashes marks the bursting of a shell from one of the warships out at sea.

Shrapnel is bursting now over the marshes and the river in the direction of Nieuport. The white puffs drift like feathers on the wind. Some ammunition wagons are passing up the road from Nieuport to Lombartzyde, and the German gunners are

<sup>1</sup> "The Battle of the Dunes," from *The Times* of 26th October 1914.

<sup>2</sup> The Yser.

<sup>3</sup> Westende and Lombartzyde.

trying to wreck them. But their shells burst too high; the wagons pass by unscathed, and enter the village. The shells continue for a while to fall harmlessly over the marshes, then cease, and the guns are turned elsewhere.

Beyond Lombartzyde there must be hard fighting forward. We can hear the sound of the rifle fire growing louder and more incessant, and along with the irregular crackle of the rifles an insistent tap-tap, tap-tap-tap, like the noise of a hammer on wood. This is the note of the mitrailleuses, a pleasant enough sound to hear, unless you know that it speaks death. When first we took up our stand it was hardly noticeable, but now it dominates the more distant sounds. The fighting must be coming nearer and the Germans gaining ground. We search the gaps between the houses for any trace of moving infantry, but there is not anything to be seen.

A step is heard on the stair below us, and we withdraw our heads. It is the captain come in from his trenches to seek temporary shelter from the rain. He explains to us how the situation lies. The Belgians are posted all round the farther side of Lombartzyde, defending the ditches and banks against the Germans attacking from Westende and Slype, the village beyond. The Germans have succeeded in capturing the Groote-Bamburgh, a big block of farm buildings to the east. This is a blow for us, as the farm forms a kind of fortress commanding the entrance to the village. As usual, they have mitrailleuses in overwhelming number.

Machine guns had been landed from the British squadron at Nieuport, and hurried up to try to save the Groote-Bamburgh, but they came too late. The Germans were already in the farm, and opened fire, killing the naval officer in charge of the detachment. This officer I afterwards heard was Lieutenant Wise, of H.M.S. *Severn*. I was told the story of his forlorn hope by some Belgian officers who saw him killed. "We were in the trenches behind the Groote-Bamburgh," they said, "when we saw him coming along with his 20 men carrying the mitrailleuses. He was walking straight across the fields with his map in his hand, shouting to his men where to go as calm as if nothing were happening. We called out to him not to go on, as we knew the Germans had got their own mitrailleuses into the farm and that it was too late. But he didn't seem to understand. He went right on. It was fine to see how calm he was. Then when he was about 50 yards from the farm the Germans suddenly opened fire, and he fell killed by the first bullets."

We would give anything to know what is going on now in Lombartzyde, where the mitrailleuses are hammering louder than ever. Have the Belgians been able to recapture the Groote-Bamburgh? If not, they will have to abandon the village, for the Germans are bringing up their guns behind the farm and rake the houses and the trenches in front of them till they are untenable. Now all of a sudden the marsh on the farther side becomes alive with moving figures. Out from their shelter under the bank rises man after man, and in a long dark line at five paces distance they move forward across the open towards the houses of Lombartzyde. These are the supports which have been waiting in readiness under cover to reinforce the fighting-line. Slowly they move forward, then disappear from sight for a moment behind a bank, then reappear again, and as they go the guns below us belch out again to cover their advance. Again and again they fire roar upon roar.

Now a cluster of white puffs appears above the long line moving across the marsh. The advance has been signalled to the German guns and they have swiftly opened fire. Another cluster appears, but still the line moves forward unbroken. A third time the four shells burst and the smoke clears away, but this time an order has been given. The line breaks into a run and swiftly covers the remaining yards of open ground. It dips behind a bank and is gone.

For ten minutes there is no sign of how the fight is going. The cannonade goes on. Both the German shells and our own are falling in and round Lombartzyde. They must be fighting now in the streets of the village. The fire increases in intensity. The house rocks to the report of the naval guns. Some of the warships have approached to half a mile's distance from the shore and are steaming backwards and forwards in line, firing their 4-in. bow guns as fast as the gunners can work them. These are the new monitors with hulls like flatirons, drawing no more than 6 feet. All the three Belgian batteries to the right of us are firing one after another and sending a continuous stream of shells into the village. We can see them bursting like rockets round the church tower, leaving a trail of smoke behind them. But it is too late. Figures reappear again on the marsh. The order to retire has been given, the village is untenable, and line after line of infantry comes out from the walls into the open and starts to cover the distance to the shelter of Nieuport. Along the road motors and cyclists are hurrying back to the town. Again the German guns speak, and the white

balls come bursting over the moving lines. They are denser now than before, but they retire as slowly and as regularly as they advanced. We strain our eyes anxiously through the glasses to see the effect of the shrapnel. Then a figure drops from the line and remains lying motionless in the marsh, now four or five fall together. Still the lines move on without wavering towards the bridges at Nieuport. Here and there we can see mounted officers walking their horses slowly behind their men. Here and there a wounded man limps step by step in the rear. Overhead the shells whistle to cover their retreat, and from the village the rattle of the musketry shows that the rear-guard is still making good the defence.

The order in which the retirement is carried out is wonderful. One has no impression of failure or defeat from the sight. It strikes one as the move of a chess player might strike a spectator who did not understand the game. He does not know the why and the wherefore. He only sees that the thing is done deliberately, without haste and after due consideration.

The Belgian troops retired to the bridgehead of Palingbrug, about 600 yards in the rear, where they maintained themselves to the end. After thirteen hours' fighting the Germans occupied Lombartzyde, from which, however, they were unable to debouch. The Belgian artillery prevented them from pushing further.

While the attack of the Germans was thus launched against the Nieuport position, other enemy troops delivered a savage assault on the Dixmude bridgehead. The day before the inhabitants of this picturesque little town had learned the terrors of battle. Since the morning of the 19th they had heard the guns firing on all sides. The Belgian projectiles whistled as they went to find the enemy formations in the open country; the Germans, who were firing at longer range, sent their shells in the opposite direction towards the Yser. With an incessant rumbling, on all sides shells went forth, crossed one another, burst in white cloudlets with a noise like a passing express. Sometimes one could count the four distinct shots of a battery which was firing deliberately, sometimes in a formidable salvo the whole pack gave tongue together, breaking windows and shaking the houses. Volleys of musketry crackled sharply in bunches. In the intervals, as slowly as a factory engine, the machine guns continued to divide the silence with their regular, nerve racking rhythm. Twice, close at hand, the savage shouts of the combatants and the loud cries of the wounded rose from the fields. A few Belgian guns passed. Marine fusiliers, always cheerful, entered the furnace near Beerst, and were swallowed by the earth near the bridge, by the paths leading to Essen, returning to the firing-line always with the same courage.

The inhabitants do not know what is going on, and are hid in their cellars for fear of the terrible hubbub. Towards evening the Belgian batteries returned from Beerst, retiring on the town, and took up a waiting position in the streets. In the cellars the people listened through the ventilators to the noise outside. There the horses rear and the gun-carriages and heavy ammunition wagons pass heavily by and disappear into the night, in retreat towards the Yser. A little later, the measured tramp of troops on the march sounds in the distance. Are they Germans? No. People look through the fanlight over the door. They are marines returning in silence, borne down by the weight of inconceivable fatigue. They defile in haste, carrying across the Yser laden stretchers, until the sound of the footsteps of the last straggler has turned the street. Are the suburbs still being defended? No one knows. The town is abandoned, sinister, silent, and dark. At intervals



the windows of the upper stories along the street light up, all of a red glow, as the fires reach a new house. The women listen whether any step sounds at the level of the ventilator, and at last fall asleep from weariness. From time to time men go out to look at the street. They expect to see the German sentries mount guard in the morning. The night at last passes. The town is still free.

Daylight gives every one new courage. But a disconcerting rumour gets about. The Belgians retired yesterday evening before German masses who swarmed from everywhere. The bridge over the Yser will be destroyed! The Germans have brought up heavier guns, and are going to bombard the town with large shells in an hour's time.

The commandant, who was found in the market-place, and when consulted has hardly time to reply in the bustle of the moment, says: "You have women and children with you? Well, go at once; but hasten, for there is not a moment to lose."

This warning is spread about. Every one comes out of the cellars, glad to regain liberty, and departs, leaving valuables and useless clothing behind. The women go away quietly, unaware of their danger. Already shells are beginning to fall. With a louder rumbling than on previous days, the heavy guns are thundering. To lessen the risk, the grenadiers make the women and children pass close along the walls, but they are disobedient and ignore the order, wishing to stop and watch the damage.

The bridge over the Yser is still standing, but the supports are mined and the handrails removed.

The children obstinately crouch down on the bank, saying that they cannot cross over this nasty water, which they can see through the planks. They have to be dragged across, to the great amusement of the marines, who have dug a trench in the embankment and have formed a parapet with sand-bags and flour-sacks.

From moment to moment the enemy fire seems to achieve a longer range: shells throw up jets of water in the Yser. The noise of the shells leaving the guns becomes more and more loud and more frequent. In Dixmude heavy shells are falling thick and fast. The disorderly crowd run into one another, get all mixed up by the constant change of destinations and arrangements. With a long look of mingled pity and astonishment the soldiers watch these groups of fugitives pass by. The tired children want to sit down by the roadside, but they must be got on, for the danger is great. Men drag along enormous bags, full to overflowing, which some suggest should be thrown into the ditch to lighten the flight. But their proprietors object. These bags contain their Sunday clothes.

Thus the pitiful procession winds on towards Lampernisse, where the danger zone will be left behind. There they turn round. Dixmude is already in flames.<sup>1</sup> . . .

The bombardment of the town by guns of large calibre began a little after 6 a.m. The enemy was preparing, by his artillery, an infantry attack, which was to be made that afternoon (on the 20th) at the same time that the battle raged at Lombartzyde, at the other end of the front.

The troops who were to attack the Dixmude bridgehead were those

<sup>1</sup> Van Houthulst, "L'agonie de Dixmude: Récit d'un témoin," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*.

whose arrival from the direction of Roulers had been noticed the day before. The Belgian positions were far from being solidly defended. On their arrival at Dixmude the marine fusiliers had dug poor little trenches of a rudimentary description, with a parapet about 12 inches high and hardly 3 feet thick at the top. The men of Meiser's brigade, who had taken the place of the marines during the 19th, had tried to better these emergency trenches as much as possible, but they had scarcely sufficient time to make a few shelters and to put up in some places some very scanty wire entanglements by making use of the fences round the fields and meadows.

The positions on the left bank of the Yser were somewhat more solidified. There the trenches were dug on the very edge of the river, leaving a parapet a good 3 feet thick at the top. Some light shelters covered the trenches, which were about 12 to 15 feet in size, and separated by earth traverses about 3 feet thick. Between the parapet and the top of the shelters loopholes had been constructed.<sup>1</sup>

On the morning of the 20th October the Dixmude bridgehead was occupied by the 12th Line Regiment and six companies of the 11th. The brigade of marines occupied and lined the left bank of the river. "Yours is the east bank and mine is the west," said Admiral Ronarc'h to Colonel Meiser, "but in case of an attack, if you want help from me, I will give it." Six companies of the 11th Line Regiment formed a reserve at Caeskerke. At the commencement of the bombardment the Belgian General Headquarters notified Colonel Meiser that his brigade was under the orders of the admiral, who was placed in command of all the forces charged with the defence of Dixmude. Meiser established his headquarters at the Dixmude flourmill, a few hundred yards west of the Yser bridge.

Two machine-gun sections of Meiser's brigade and five sections from the marines blocked the roads round the town towards Beerst, Eessen, near the Handzaeme canal, and at the Dixmude cemetery.

The Belgian artillery was on the left bank of the Yser, at the summit of the Oostkerke road, on the Pervyse road, to the north of Caeskerke, at Kappelhoek, and at St.-Jacques-Cappelle. At the beginning of the afternoon 71 guns were assisting in the defence of the bridgehead. But these were only 7.5-mm. guns, and would be useless for replying to the fire of the German large guns. Nevertheless, as usual, they did excellent work within their range of action.<sup>2</sup>

While these dispositions were being taken to repulse the attack expected that day, the German artillery continued to bombard Dixmude and its outskirts. At eight o'clock the shells began to fall round the trenches on the left bank. On their side, the Belgian batteries, knowing that Beerst and Vladsloo were occupied by the enemy, opened fire on those places and on the roads to them. At ten o'clock it was announced that the German infantry were commencing a movement on Dixmude, the 43rd Reserve Division coming from Beerst and Vladsloo and the 23rd Reserve Army Corps coming from Eessen, having driven the French cavalry from Zarren.

The first groups of German infantry were seen coming out of Vladsloo. Almost at the same moment others appeared on the outskirts of Beerst. They emerged from every farm and every thicket on the

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 82-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-6.

road which joins these two villages. The Belgian batteries at once redoubled their activity and increased the intensity of the fire they were already directing towards that region.

At the same time, to the east, in the Eessen district, other columns of Germans advanced along the canal and railway. The 1st battalion of the 12th Line Regiment near Beerst-Vladsloo and the 2nd battalion near Eessen were the first to receive the shock. Somewhat excited, but firm and resolute, the men were determined not to tarnish the glory which had covered these regiments at the assault on Liège.

The enemy columns, surprised by the intensity of the fire of the Belgian 7.5's, which fired without a break, halted abruptly, took cover, and vanished from sight. At the same moment from the threatening sky salvos of shells came moaning and wailing.

The heavy guns brought from Antwerp, howitzers, and field artillery all united to crush the bridgehead under the weight of iron. On the trenches of the 12th Line Regiment, on Dixmude, on the positions of the marines beyond the Yser, on the reserves at Caeskerke, and on the emplacements of the Belgian batteries a storm of projectiles fell.

At the extreme left of the defence the trenches dug near the Beerst road were taken under a cross-fire by the enemy. Commandant Pouplier fell in a heap without a sound. At Dixmude itself, where Colonel Jacques, in charge of the defence of the positions east of the Yser, had established his headquarters at the town-hall, bursting shells flew about on all sides. Jacques, who was calmly issuing his instructions at the Grand' Place, was struck by a fragment and seriously wounded in the foot.

The hero of the Arab campaign did not allow himself to be put out for so little; after a hurried dressing he asked for a stick to lean on, and then, growling curses at the "Boches," he continued to direct the defence. The General Headquarters had just sent him the order: "The Dixmude bridgehead must be held." Jacques merely observed: "That is obvious."

When sending Admiral Ronarc'h the order to hold out at all costs, the Belgian High Command also informed him that all the artillery of the 5th Division would come to assist the defenders of Dixmude. But events prevented the fulfilment of this promise. Other sectors of the front were in peril during that day, the 20th October, and this prevented the number of guns promised from being sent. Nevertheless the artillery group of the 16th Brigade, and then that of the 1st mixed brigade, arrived to reinforce the defence, bringing the number of guns in action up to 71.

Having regard to the admirable way in which the Belgian artillery was handled during the Battle of the Yser, it is possible that the guns concentrated at Dixmude would have had the better of those against them, but for the presence of the heavy German artillery. Against that they could do nothing.

These heavy guns appeared to increase in numbers, and their bombardment became truly infernal. Under the cover of this tempest of fire beating on the Belgian positions, the German infantry reappeared. They came along all the roads on the north and east which converge on Dixmude. The Belgian 7.5's kept up a storm of fire to stop the

attack which was in preparation, but the grey masses continued their inexorable advance.

All at once, at 3 p.m. precisely, the German guns extended their fire, shelling Dixmude and all the ways behind it by which reserves could be brought up. The moment of attack had arrived. The Germans, as if moved by a spring, rushed out of their last shelter. They ran forward shouting resounding "Hochs!" with rifles at the hip, towards the sector occupied by the 12th Line Regiment. The assailants came on in close order and deep masses. They were new formations, fresh from Germany, with a stiffening of veterans. There were boys of sixteen and corpulent men nearing forty years of age. They marched into fire with admirable courage, several ranks deep, singing patriotic songs.

The trenches of the 12th Line Regiment, half demolished by shells, at once sent forth an implacable and accurate fire. Rifles and machine guns poured torrents of lead into these moving masses. Entire ranks of the Germans were mown down. The "Hochs" and the songs stuck in their throats, and nothing was heard but oaths, death-rattles, and groans. The German officers, revolver in hand, in vain encouraged their men, who paid no heed, but lay down flat in the fields and stayed there, 300 yards from the Belgians.

A company of the 11th Line Regiment soon came up to the trenches as a reinforcement. Colonel Jacques sent another from the Grand' Place of Dixmude, but it was dispersed by the bombardment before it could make its way out of the town. Reinforcements also reached the enemy. From the place where they had lain down the Germans poured a furious fire at the Belgians, and their machine guns demolished the little parapet behind which the men of the 12th Line Regiment were sheltering. Some of the trenches were enfiladed. All the officers in them were placed *hors de combat*.

It was obviously no longer possible to cling to the destroyed trenches on the Beerst road. Although there were no officers to lead them, the surviving soldiers retired to a little trench 200 yards in the rear.

The enemy at once sprang forward. The situation was critical. The loss of the trenches on the Beerst road had dangerously exposed those next to them. In order to pin down the Germans the Belgian and French machine guns fired without a pause. From the other bank of the Yser, in spite of the distance, the marines added their fire to that of the 12th Line Regiment.

In vain, for the Germans soon flooded the position, and the machine guns were saved only with difficulty.

These were terrible moments for Colonel Jacques, who had no more reserves at command. Nevertheless he played a bold game. He ordered the 2nd battalion of the 12th to hold out at all costs, and sent the 1st battalion to retake these trenches without fail, promising them that reinforcements would arrive.

In truth he did not know when these reinforcements, which he had asked Colonel Meiser for, would come. As luck would have it, the cyclist company of the 3rd Division, a hundred bold and resolute men, arrived at this moment at the Grand' Place in Dixmude. Jacques threw them into the furnace on the Beerst road. Their arrival enabled the 1st battalion of the 12th to hold their ground, while the 2nd bat-

talion carried out their commander's orders and, as he had told them, held out "at all costs." The Germans were again stopped.

Colonel Meiser had ordered the six companies of the 11th Line Regiment in reserve at Caeskerke to respond to Colonel Jacques' appeal for assistance. While these troops were crossing the Yser to rejoin the defenders of Dixmude, the Belgian artillery violently bombarded the road from Dixmude to Beerst at the spot where the enemy's thrust was most pressing. Colonel Meiser also asked Admiral Ronarc'h to put some marines at his disposal.

The six companies of the 11th Line Regiment, under Lieut.-Colonel Leestmans, had hardly got in motion towards Dixmude before the German artillery discovered them and sent a hail of shells at them. The space that they had to cover from Caeskerke halt to the Yser bridge was ploughed up by shells of all calibres. Explosion after explosion occurred on the road and the fields alongside it. Houses fell in ruins, and fragments of walls were scattered in all directions.

The ranks of the leading companies wavered. They hesitated to plunge into this zone of death. Several men jumped into the ditch alongside the road and crouched there. The lieutenant-colonel rushed to them, waving his sword and crying: "Hurrah for the 11th! Forward, my lads!" The officers followed his example, encouraged their men, and urged them to advance, for their brothers-in-arms at Dixmude were in urgent need of reinforcements.

The men regained self-control. Now they advance through the terrific bombardment. Some fall dead without a cry; others are wounded and lie stretched out on the road. The advance continues and reaches the flourmill. Colonel Meiser is there, watching his brave fellows going to face death. The ranks cheer him.

Boom! an immense shell bursts in the middle of the road. A whole group is knocked down, and men lie on the ground with their heads shattered. A soldier—a mere boy of eighteen—gives a piercing cry of "Mother!" drops his rifle, and with eyes full of fear reels round and falls at Colonel Meiser's feet. His spine is fractured.

To avoid the danger, Lieut.-Colonel Leestmans shouted "Double" and led his men to the bridge, 300 yards away. The six companies, urged by a terrible thirst for vengeance, made for it and crossed it in sight of the marines entrenched on the bank. The French, carried away by the sight, cheered and waved their caps, shouting, "Long live the Belgians!" But for their officers, they would have leaped from their shelters and rushed after the men of the line.

The six companies of the 11th were now on the right bank of the Yser. Shortly after 5 p.m. they debouched in the Grand' Place in Dixmude, panting but eager. Colonel Jacques, without giving them any breathing-time, sent three companies to the Beerst road to push back the enemy. Two others were despatched to Bloot-Putteken, where Labeau's company had been holding out for hours against superior forces. Preceded by the cyclists of the 3rd Division, whose arrival we have mentioned, the three first reinforcing companies rushed to attack the trenches which the 1st battalion of the 12th had been forced to evacuate, and where the Germans were rapidly organizing themselves.

The Belgian batteries supported the movement from the other side

of the Yser. In their turn the companies of the 12th rushed forward. The Belgian skirmishers advanced by short rushes; they saw that the enemy was becoming nervous. There were uneasy movements among the occupants of the trenches taken a moment before. The Belgians were only 100 yards away. Groups of the enemy were already jumping out of the shelters and running away. The moment had come. The Belgian bugles sounded the charge. The men of the 11th and 12th rushed forward with fixed bayonets, shouting, "Long live the King!"

The Germans gave way; pushing by one another in the communication trenches, they tried to get out. Those who succeeded disappeared rapidly in the direction of Beerst. But the Belgians were already upon them. The occupants of the trenches were pinned to the bottom or the sides with bayonets. Others held up their hands, crying frantically and hoarsely, "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

At Bloot-Putteken the other two companies of the 11th had a similar success. Hand-to-hand fighting gave them the first-line trenches which had been temporarily evacuated.

Darkness was approaching. Both in the north and north-east the positions of the Dixmude bridgehead were again firmly in the hands of the Belgians, thanks to the valour of the soldiers and to the firmness and resolution of Colonel Jacques.

The Germans were in retreat. Whistles were sounding to break off the combat.<sup>1</sup>

At six o'clock four companies of marines crossed the Yser and came in their turn to reinforce the defenders of Dixmude. Two of these companies proceeded to occupy the trenches west of the Beerst road, the loss of which had for the moment compromised the defence of the Dixmude bridgehead. The other two were kept in reserve.

They were needed, for throughout the night the Germans renewed their attacks, rising suddenly from out of the darkness, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, uttering savage "Hochs!" The marines and the men of Meiser's brigade did not allow themselves to be disturbed by these shouts, and, returning blow for blow, repulsed their assailants.

About 5 a.m., at the time of reliefs, a new attack was launched, more violent than before. Once more it was repulsed. When the Germans drew off, leaving many dead in front of the position, Lieutenant Minsart, of the 11th Line Regiment, rushed his company out of the trenches in pursuit of the enemy. The Belgians chased the Germans to the north of the Handzaeme canal and brought back with them an officer and sixty men captured behind the crazy ruins of the "In de dry Musschen" Inn.

Thus ended the attack on Dixmude of the 20th October.<sup>2</sup>

During this time the German heavy artillery had continued its regular, methodical bombardment. Half the town was already in ruins. In the evening the refugees saw from Alveringhem the town in flames, as they also saw Nieuport and the farms and churches of this rich and fertile country—flames as far as the eye could reach, as far as the border of the distant forests.

During the whole day of the 20th October the whole of the rest of the Yser front between Nieuport and Dixmude was subjected to a

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 34-6, 86-95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

violent bombardment. The noise was deafening. Losses mounted up in the trenches, which had continually to be repaired under fire. But no one dreamed of retiring. Before St.-Georges, the ground between the Yser and the road from Rattevalle to Mannekensvere was kept under constant machine-gun fire by a section of the 23th battery (5th mixed brigade), which had reinforced the batteries of the 7th Brigade. The German troops in Mannekensvere were thus pinned to their ground, and were obliged to entrench themselves briskly in front of the positions of the 7th Brigade.

The enemy's artillery shelled this part of the Belgian front with particular vigour. The shells fell without ceasing from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

At the village of St.-Georges not a single house remained intact, and the troops in the trenches and in reserve in this district suffered heavily. In view of the enemy's persistent threat to the Pont de l'Union, the 7th Line Regiment received orders to remain all night in their fighting positions.<sup>1</sup>

During the 20th the German army had completed its concentration and deployment before the Belgian front. When dawn broke on the 21st October the enemy forces were echeloned as follows: the 4th Reserve Division was opposite Nieuport; the 3rd Reserve Army Corps from Nieuport to Keyem; the 22nd Reserve Army Corps north of Dixmude; and lastly, the 23rd Reserve Army Corps opposite Dixmude and to the south of the town. There were altogether seven divisions against the Belgian army. They threw into the struggle not merely fresh troops, but also a formidable artillery, continually being increased by heavy guns brought from Antwerp.<sup>2</sup>

Before such a concentration of forces it became urgently necessary to limit strictly the front that the Belgian army had to defend. The Belgian and French Commands agreed that the defence of the line of the Yser by the Belgian army should stop at the height of St.-Jacques-Cappelle, on a front of 20 kilometres. French troops were to take on the defence of the line towards the south and protect the Belgians against a turning movement on the right.<sup>3</sup>

On this front of 20 kilometres held by King Albert's troops over four hundred guns of different calibres, ranging from 7.7 to 21 cm., were brought into action. The Belgians had, to oppose them, only three hundred and fifty field guns (7.5's) and twenty-four howitzers (15 cm.), the ammunition for which was very scanty.<sup>4</sup>

Now that all the advanced posts had fallen into their hands, the Germans were about to prepare, during the 21st, the passage of the Yser by a cannonade. Already, during the night of the 20th October, the fire of the whole of the German artillery had with extreme precision battered the first lines and the ground behind them. This deluge continued on the 21st. The trenches of the 2nd Division near Nieuport and St.-Georges were wrecked, destroyed by shell fire. It was the same with the positions occupied by the 1st Division near Schoorbakke. At Dixmude, at times, explosions occurred at the rate of twenty to thirty a minute.

The Belgian troops held fast everywhere. They were valiantly supported by their small guns, which worked their hardest all along

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 47-8.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 133.

the front from the sea to the south of Dixmude. Their mission was to support the infantry at all costs. They could not dream for a moment of mastering the enemy artillery, which was too powerful and in part out of range. They had to keep the enemy's fire off the infantry as much as possible, and to pepper the German troops with machine-gun fire, so as to hinder their advance and maintain the *moral* of the Belgians. Subjected to an intense bombardment, at times even under the fire of the enemy infantry, suffering cruel losses, obliged to bring up supplies under fire, every moment seeing their telephone wires broken, having to combat all sorts of attacks, and consuming a prodigious amount of ammunition, these batteries remained under fire both night and day, the men literally sleeping on their guns.<sup>1</sup>

Almost everywhere noteworthy deeds bore witness to the excellence of the work of the gunners. At Groenendyk, behind a channel that joins Nieuport to the sea, a group of three batteries of the 3rd Division (61st, 62nd, and 63rd), firing volleys, pinned the enemy down, and forced the German artillery posted near Westende to cease fire and shift its position.

From their captive balloon, which was up near Oostdunkerke, the English observation officers attached to the vessels operating on the coast signalled that the firing of the Belgian batteries was marvellous, and that enemy ammunition wagons had been blown up and an immense column of smoke was rising from the spot occupied by the German batteries.<sup>2</sup>

At another spot, in front of Schoorbakke and Ramscappelle, the artillery group of the 2nd mixed brigade was so effective that it attracted the particular attention of the commandant of the 5th German Reserve Division. An order signed by him was intercepted, which said: "The 6th Reserve Division must silence by the cross-fire of its howitzer batteries the enemy batteries to the south-east of Schoorbakke, especially the battery at the bend of the Yser south-east of Schoorbakke, which is preventing the progress of the 5th Reserve Division."<sup>3</sup>

Supported by the wonderful little guns, and taking advantage of a lull in the bombardment, the 6th Line Regiment, assisted by two battalions of the Chasseurs à pied, succeeded in regaining ground in the direction of Lombartzyde. Further south, in front of St.-Georges and at the Pont de l'Union, the 7th Line Regiment heroically withstood all assaults on its positions. The trenches it occupied crumbled away, many of its officers were placed *hors de combat*, and a whole company was wiped out by heavy shells. In spite of everything they held on. The moment was truly critical. The enemy, provided with foot-bridges, had been able to get to within nearly 500 yards of the defending force. The order was given to resist to the last, in spite of the terrible losses that the regiment had suffered. In the last two days it had lost five officers and 250 men.<sup>4</sup>

Farther along, near Schoorbakke, the combat raged round the positions held by the 1st Division. The bridgehead defended by the 3rd Line Regiment underwent two violent attacks. The trenches of

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 68-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.



the 8th Line Regiment at Tervaete were also assaulted. Two attempts to cross were made opposite Dupré's Farm by troops setting out from Schoore and Spermalie. The enemy was everywhere held and repulsed.<sup>1</sup> Not content with their violent assaults on the centre of the Belgian front, the Germans did not let the day of the 21st go by without launching fresh attacks against Dixmude.

Here the valiant defenders of the bridgehead had received considerable reinforcements at dawn on the 21st. As Colonel Meiser had no more reserves available, the 5th Division was, on the night of the 20th, ordered to place troops at the disposal of Admiral Ronarc'h. The task of going to reinforce the weary men of the line at Dixmude fell to the lot of the 2nd Chasseurs à pied. The 3rd battalion of the 2nd Chasseurs at once set out on the march. Colonel Meiser took advantage of this to rearrange his troops and relieve the two battalions of the 12th Line Regiment, who had held on so valiantly the day before and could do no more. The trenches were now manned by some companies of the 11th Line Regiment, one battalion of the 2nd Chasseurs, and three companies of marine fusiliers. Colonel Jacques held in reserve at Dixmude the remainder of the 11th, one company of marines, and the cyclists of the 3rd Division.

At dawn on the 21st the German artillery again began to shell Dixmude and the Belgian positions. Heavy guns of 15, 21, and even 28 cm. were in action and hurled tons of shells at the trenches and the luckless town. There the damage was terrific. The earth shook continuously. The Belgian reserves there lived in a veritable hell, taking shelter as best they could. Colonel Jacques and his staff still remained at the town-hall, paying no heed to the shells which kept on falling round the building. From time to time a more formidable explosion would shake the ancient building to its foundation. Some one would look up and say, "Another 28 cm."<sup>2</sup>

At nine o'clock the attack of the enemy infantry got under way. They were seen marching from Eessen towards Kappelhoek on both sides of the railway. As in the assault on the day before, they were young troops stiffened by veterans. They advanced as if on manoeuvres in a column of platoons. Hardly had they started before all the Belgian artillery opened, firing murderous salvos. The columns of grey uniforms were seen to hesitate, then to stop, and for the moment to abandon the attack. At once the German heavy artillery began to fire with renewed vigour.

It was nearly 11 a.m. Colonel Meiser ordered the last battalion of the chasseurs, placed in reserve at Caeskerke, to come up to Dixmude. Along the same road by which the companies of the 11th Line Regiment had come the day before, the chasseurs advanced under the noisy vault of the trajectories of shells passing one another with a continuous rumbling like trains at full speed. Near the railway, a large shell burst to the right of the men on the march. "Dixmude! All change here!" cried a wag. The bridge over the Yser, knocked about by bursting shells, was crossed in a few rapid strides amid the applause of the marines, hidden in their dugouts along the river-bank. The chasseurs passed through blazing Dixmude in column of fours, with rifles slung. The Grand' Place was ploughed up with 15 and

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 97-8.

21-cm. shells; every instant men fell, disembowelled or with shattered heads. At last the chasseurs reach the positions assigned to them by Colonel Jacques on the Beerst road.<sup>1</sup>

They were scarcely there before a new attack took shape, this time north of Dixmude. A seething mass of grey uniforms comes from Beerst. Their advance is again stopped by the fire of the Belgian artillery. Yet they begin to dig feverishly in the ground between the Beerst road and the Yser. A battery shells these groups of workers, but is itself subjected to a violent counter-shelling by the enemy and reduced to silence.

The bombardment had by then attained an extraordinary degree of violence. The little Belgian trenches are smashed to atoms. Continual explosions bury dead, wounded, and living together. Limbs are torn off and thrown in the air. Belgian troopers and marines crouch in their dugouts, covering their faces with their hand so as not to see, their rifles placed between their knees, awaiting death or the assault.

Dixmude was a veritable furnace. The church had caught alight. There was no quarter left intact. Enormous holes gaped in the streets and public places. Everywhere heaps of broken glass, plaster, and brickwork. On the Grand' Place the town-hall, still intact, raised its mediæval silhouette against a background of fire and smoke.<sup>2</sup>

Inside the ancient building there reigned an impressive silence. There, in the middle of the Salle des Pas Perdus, rested under an improvised catafalque the body of Captain Pouplier, who was killed the day before in the trenches at Beerst.

The arrival of his remains at Dixmude town-hall was dramatic. During the bombardment the great vestibule of the town-hall was filled with French and Belgian officers, wounded men, chaplains, and German prisoners. Outside, the Grand' Place was empty and mournful, filled with a yellow, acrid smoke. To cross it one crept along close to the walls. Suddenly a tiny procession entered this scene of death. A Belgian chaplain, walking with a tranquil step, led four soldiers who were carrying a bier on their shoulders. This group reached the porch of the town-hall. A profound silence fell upon the busy crowd swarming in the vestibule. The chaplain, Father Brouwers, a Jesuit of Liège, bowed to Colonel Jacques and pointed to the bier, on which some one had placed a tiny Belgian flag upon a brown cloth which covered a body. "This is Captain Pouplier, of the 12th, who is killed," he said. "Pouplier!" replied Colonel Jacques in a mournful voice. "Ah! he was my friend." He leaned forward and, raising the covering, he kissed the bloodstained face of the dead.

The chaplain joined his hands. "Let us say a *Paternoster* for the brave man." And when the prayer was over, "Now let us say an *Ave Maria*, that his wife and children and all Belgians may be worthy of such a patriot."

On the 21st Captain Pouplier was taken to his last resting-place. Behind the coffin-bearers came the standard-bearer of the 12th Line

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 28th October 1915.

<sup>2</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 98-9.

Regiment with its glorious flag, the chaplain, and a group of officers. Under the shell fire the cortège crossed the Grand' Place and journeyed to the cemetery along the Woumen road. The Germans hardly saw them before they fired on them with machine guns. At the cemetery, while the chaplain said the last prayers, those present, grouped round the standard, were forced to kneel or lie down behind the tombs. At the moment the priest uttered the parting words, "*Requiescat in pace,*" a large figure of Christ, near by, suddenly tottered and fell, overturned by a German shell.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime the trenches of the bridgehead were continually under a terrible and implacable bombardment, which attained its greatest height. About 2 p.m. a frightful tragedy occurred at Dixmude town-hall. The officers of the Staff of the 16th mixed brigade and the 2nd Chasseurs had just entered the building to take over the staff work of the 11th and 12th Line Regiments when a 21-cm. shell burst in the Salle des Pas Perdus.

It was like an earthquake. Doors and windows were blown out, tables and chairs overturned and thrown against the wall. The next room was a shocking spectacle. There were about fifty men in it at the time of the explosion. Most of them were either killed on the spot or frightfully wounded, and they lay under a shapeless mass of debris and fallen ceiling. Blood was trickling everywhere. Trunks of bodies were thrown in all directions. Half mad and unable to stand his sight any longer, one of the bystanders rushed to the door, which appeared to be guarded by an impassable marine.

This sentry was motionless against the wall, his head a little inclined towards his shoulder; his chest was slightly bent and leaning on his rifle, which was placed upright between his legs. As the person who was flying from this place of fear came in contact with the butt of the rifle, the body of the marine fell to the ground. He was dead; the explosion had killed him standing.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst Dr. Hendrickx, who alone remained to solace the misery and pain of the wounded, was working whole-heartedly in this place of death, the German artillery was lengthening its fire. For the third time the enemy attack was being launched. The young soldiers of the 3rd Army Corps rushed forward in dense masses, with resounding shouts of "Hoch!" The soldiers of the 11th Line Regiment and of the 2nd Chasseurs and the marines leaped to their feet and fired without a break. The attack broke before this unexpected fire. The enemy columns scattered, turned, and hastily regained the trenches from which the attack was launched.<sup>3</sup>

Advantage was taken of the lull which followed to remove the wounded to Dixmude. These poor creatures found themselves in a real furnace there. Incendiary bombs had caused dreadful fires everywhere. Whole streets were in flames. Soon the flames got near the ceiling station where the wounded lay. These were terrified by the sea that they might perish in a horrible manner. Colonel Meiser ordered every available ambulance to be sent to Dixmude. The

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes de 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 30th October 1915; W. Breton, op. cit. p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 101-2.

vehicles set out in a long file along the Caeskerke road through the bombardment, and were soon passing through the blazing streets.

When the first of them reached the receiving station there was almost delirium. Everywhere suppliant hands were outstretched, and cries of "Save me! Take me!" were raised. Surgeons, orderlies and stretcher-bearers united their efforts, increased tenfold by the danger. When at last the final ambulance had gone, the flames were licking the walls of the abandoned building.<sup>1</sup>

At six o'clock, while the fires were raging, the Germans again attacked, especially between the Eessen and Woumen roads, against the front held by the 3rd battalion of the 2nd Chasseurs. This time the attacking force succeeded in getting to within 75 yards of the trenches. Fortunately two companies of the 11th Line Regiment, sent as reinforcements, came up just as a hand-to-hand struggle was threatening to give the Germans certain elements of the trenches. The Belgian counter-attack repulsed the assailants and once more forced them to retire.

The respite was, however, of short duration. The German offensive soon began again at the Dixmude cemetery, and at the same time spread northward against the trenches bordering on the Keyem road. Here for a moment the situation was extremely critical. In spite of the furious firing of the Belgian troopers and of the marines, who collected the weapons of the dead and wounded to replace those which had become useless, a German column, uttering savage yells, had got as far as the parapet of some of the trenches. There was a merciless struggle with butt-ends and bayonets. At one point the defenders were overwhelmed by numbers and gave ground; the assailants at once rushed through the breach thus opened.

They did not get far. A company of marines and two of the 11th Line Regiment came up at the double, sent there by Colonel Sults, of the chasseurs, who had replaced Colonel Jacques at Dixmude as director of the operations east of the Yser. With fixed bayonets and rifles firmly grasped in their robust hands, the French marines rushed into the fray shouting, "Hold on, Belgians! We are here! We'll stick them in the stomach!"

The counter-attack was magnificent. French and Belgians drove off the enemy, and before 3 a.m. the abandoned trenches were retaken.

At this time the most tragic disorder reigned in the Belgian positions. Machine-gun sections of the 12th Line Regiment, chasseurs and marines, covered with mud and blood, were mixed up together. Their equipment was multifarious—anything that could be seized upon was found good enough to replace worn-out weapons and to repulse the Germans. Heaps of enemy corpses covered the ground over which the attack had come. They were even found behind the Belgian lines in little trenches that they must have feverishly worked during the night when they had for the moment broken through.

In spite of the firing which broke out afresh at intervals, some Belgians came out of their dugouts to go and bring in the enemy wounded who were writhing and groaning with pain in front of the trenches. "One can't anyway let them die like dogs," said Chasseurs

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* p. 104.

audour. He brought in no fewer than forty-nine wounded Germans himself.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the Germans were attacking in the north, other columns had assaulted the positions to the south-east of Dixmude. Seven times the enemy returned to the attack, seven times he was repulsed. During the last assault a few Germans in the confusion succeeded in reaching the trenches and uttered shouts of triumph.

Not perceiving in the darkness how many were firing at them from behind, some soldiers believed that they were surrounded by numerous forces and took to flight.

Captain Dupuis, revolver in hand, rushed in front of the fugitives and led them back to the trenches.

Here also when day broke the enemy had disappeared, regaining the point of departure of the attack.<sup>2</sup>

During the 21st and for a good deal of the night following the Belgian army had held out in all its positions. Dixmude was impregnable. Nieuport remained in the hands of its defenders.

Seeing that his efforts against the two buttresses of the defence had only brought him bloody repulses, the enemy, taking advantage of his superior numbers, attempted to pierce the Belgian front at its most exposed point, that is, at the Tervaete bend.

The attack here was launched towards the end of the night of the 21st.<sup>3</sup> For forty-eight hours the bend made by the Yser at this point was shelled with extreme violence. The enemy batteries posted to the east of Schoore, Leke, Keyem, and Kasteelhoek took the Belgian trenches, under a cross-fire, in enfilade and in reverse. In the Dutch town of L'Écluse, 45 kilometres in the rear, the windows were shaken by the vibration of the German artillery fire. Under cover of this bombardment and favoured by the darkness, the enemy succeeded in capturing a foot-bridge east of Tervaete and getting into the bend. A German column came through this opening and obtained a footing on the left bank of the Yser.

This was the first grave event of the battle. If the enemy could throw considerable forces across the river and enlarge the breach thus made, the whole defence of the river-line would be fatally compromised.

The Belgians, fully aware of the gravity of this menace, did everything to arrest the flood of invaders, and, if possible, to throw them back across the river. At dawn on the 22nd vigorous counter-attacks were put in hand. In the afternoon the Belgians by a supreme effort succeeded after several attempts in driving the Germans back to the river.<sup>4</sup> A battalion of the 2nd Line Regiment pushed up to the north side of the bend and drove the assailants back to Schoore at the same time as the 4th Line Regiment were repulsing a violent attack on the Schoorbakke bridgehead. At the height of Tervaete the 8th Line Regiment maintained its position at the price of heavy losses. To ease its task, carabiniers and grenadiers made vigorous counter-attacks, but were not able to throw the enemy back to the right bank of the river. Nevertheless, a grenadier battalion advanced in the bend

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 104-6; "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 2nd November 1915.

<sup>2</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> See M. C., "La charge de Tervaete," in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 286-9.

within 300 yards of the dikes. There it came under machine-gun fire and was unable to continue its advance. As it was unsupported, it had to retire during the night.

At dusk the Germans attacked with fresh contingents. The Belgians, exhausted by the desperate efforts of the day, were driven back 600 yards. Tervaete remained in the hands of the enemy, and detachments of the 6th and 44th German Divisions crossed to the left bank and rapidly dug themselves in.<sup>1</sup>

This was the only success gained by the enemy. His attacks elsewhere were fruitless, and by the sea-coast he was even forced to withdraw somewhat. At dawn on the 22nd patrols of the 6th Line Regiment found that Lombartzyde was only lightly held by the enemy. Some companies were sent to reconnoitre and confirmed this intelligence. Orders were at once given that the village was to be retaken. An attacking party was made up under the command of Colonel Jacques. The 1st Chasseurs à pied advanced between the sea and Lombartzyde, and the 8th Line Regiment towards Lombartzyde and Groote-Bamburgh farm. The Belgian artillery at Groenendyl supported the assault by a very effective rapid fire, under cover of which the columns of attack advanced rapidly and reached the outer edge of Lombartzyde. Their progress was held up by the German machine guns, and a counter-attack had to be beaten off by the 3rd battalion of the 9th Line Regiment. The Belgians were content to dig themselves in at the approaches to the village, hoping to continue the movement at daybreak. Groote-Bamburgh farm was attacked without result; it remained in the enemy's hands.

In the positions further south, before St.-Georges and the Pond de l'Union, the Belgians had heroically resisted all assaults. At four o'clock on the morning of the 22nd October the Belgian artillery demolished the ruins of the houses, about 500 yards from the positions, where German machine guns had been established and enfiladed the trenches of the 7th Line Regiment. The Belgian fire was so effective that fragments of human bodies were seen to be thrown into the air by the bursting of the shells.

At this point the enemy bombardment had very early in the day begun again with undiminished violence. At nine o'clock the German infantry prepared to make a new attack. A section of the 27th Belgian battery moved behind the Yser embankment and opened on the enemy at 700 yards. The 25th and 26th batteries valiantly supported the section, and succeeded in stopping dead all the German preparation for attack. The men of the 7th Line Regiment, in spite of the rain of shells and shrapnel that beat on their positions, did not budge. For three nights and four days they had been there, bleeding, covered with mud, with uniforms in tatters, their faces black with smoke and their rifles burning their hands.

When night fell the order came for the fourth time to hold out at all costs. There was more need than ever to appeal to the men's spirit of sacrifice, as the grave situation at the Tervaete bend imperatively demanded that the trenches in front of St.-Georges and the Pond de l'Union should be held without fail.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 78; *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 135-6. W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 38-9, 64-5.

The heroism of the 7th of the Line did not pass unrewarded. At the same time that they received the order to hold on, the men learned that the King had conferred the Cross of the Order of Leopold on the regimental colour.

It was an indescribable moment of emotion, of joy, and of pride. From the trenches upon which darkness was falling a shout resounded, like a defiance to the enemy, "Vive le Roi! Vive la Belgique!"<sup>1</sup>

Finally, at Dixmude the visibly wearied enemy had not renewed his attacks in mass. At 8 a.m. the situation was reassuring. In spite of the bombardment, which continued without a break, the defenders of Dixmude worked hard at restoring the trenches. The Germans were entrenched only a few hundred yards away, and the activity manifested by them portended new attacks.

In sight of the enemy, Belgian search parties went out to gather up the booty abandoned in front of their trenches after the sanguinary assaults of the day before. Sergeant Gilman, with some chasseurs and a patrol of marines, brought in two German machine guns. Dr. Van der Ghinst, who went out to bring in some of the wounded of the enemy, had found these guns hidden, behind a straw stack. More than 250 rifles were picked up at this place alone, to say nothing of helmets, knapsacks, and bandoliers still full of cartridges.<sup>2</sup>

As hunger was becoming cruelly acute, some soldiers went to search for food in the nearest houses which had been gutted by shells. Others who went in the direction of Dixmude were fortunate enough to discover in some deserted houses some provisions and bottles of wine.

One of them, a little shamefaced at this pillage, said to a marine who was also searching in the ruins, "You know, we look uncommonly like thieves." The Frenchman winked, as he answered, "Don't worry, old man. We'll offer a glass to the chaplain and he will give us absolution."

The hours passed by without any attempt by the enemy to attack. At the beginning of the afternoon an order of Admiral Ronarc'h was communicated to the men. This was to the effect that an important engagement was taking place near the Forest of Houthulst between the British forces and three German army corps, and went on:—

To assist this action and ensure its success, it is essential that the Yser line and in particular the Dixmude bridgehead shall remain intact. It is therefore essential that the trenches shall be held with the utmost determination, in spite of the repeated desperate efforts of the enemy. . . .

The admiral relies upon the Belgian forces and on the marines to hold their trenches at all costs and to retake them at no matter what price if a surprise should oblige them to give way for a moment.<sup>3</sup>

To avoid as much as possible the nocturnal surprises to which the Germans were addicted, it was decided as soon as night fell to set light to the numerous stacks that were still found in the middle of the fields.

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 49-50; "Le 7<sup>e</sup> de ligne," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 14th November 1914.

<sup>2</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. p. 108; "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 4th November 1915.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. p. 109.

There were some about 500 yards from the Belgian lines. In spite of the danger, many volunteered for the task. Several of these brave men never came back, but one by one the stacks were fired, becoming gigantic torches with their flames blown about by the wind.<sup>1</sup>

The spectacle was magnificent but forbidding. In front of the Belgian lines the burning stacks lit up the battlefield and shone with ruddy fantastic gleams on the heaps of enemy corpses.

In the distance, behind the trenches, Dixmude was also burning. Enormous flames were mounting heavenwards, and through their light could be discerned, like blackened stumps, the remains of the town-hall and the church.

Up till that time everything was quiet. Even the bombardment had died away. Suddenly, about seven o'clock, Captain Smets, of the 2nd Chasseurs, saw lanterns moving in front of his trench, and voices were heard saying, "Belgians! Don't fire. Have mercy on the wounded whom we are picking up."

As nothing moved and the lanterns remained in the same places, only a few yards away, Captain Smets suspected a treacherous ruse. He was right, for suddenly a German machine gun discovered itself and opened fire. Volleys from the chasseurs soon reduced it to silence and the enemy disappeared.<sup>2</sup>

About eleven o'clock he came again, attacking the north and south-east of the positions. The attempted assault was defeated by a murderous fire from the men of the 1st Line Regiment, 2nd Chasseurs, and marines. The enemy only made a feeble attack and soon regained his trenches.<sup>3</sup>

Thus ended the day of the 22nd October. On this day the English papers published the following communication from the Press Bureau on the subject of the efforts of the Belgian army:—

Throughout yesterday the enemy made vigorous counter-attacks against the Allies' front, but were beaten back, suffering considerable losses. The Belgian army in particular distinguished itself by its spirit and brave defence of its position.

In regard to the last part of the above announcement by the War Office, the Press Bureau has received from an authentic source the following description of the Belgian army's work, which will be read with pride both by the Belgians who have had to flee from their native land and by those Allies amongst whom they are now finding temporary rest and shelter:—

For the last four days the Belgian army have been in their trenches, holding a line of some 30 kilometres with the greatest determination against heavy odds. On several occasions they have made brave and successful attacks against the German forces attacking the position they held, and have shown the soldier-like qualities that have distinguished the Belgian army during the long period they have been fighting against superior forces of the enemy in their own country.<sup>4</sup>

At daybreak on the 23rd October the situation was grave.<sup>5</sup> The Schoorbakke bridgehead had been rendered untenable during the

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 6th November 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; W. Breton, *op. cit.* p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 109-10.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Times* of 22nd October 1914.

<sup>5</sup> As to the events of the 23rd October, see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 79, *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 133-40, and W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 39, 110-11.



night, having been taken in reverse by German machine guns. The battalion of the 4th Line Regiment which was there was brought across to the left bank, and the bridge over the Yser was destroyed.

Unless reinforcements were at hand the Belgian army, absolutely exhausted, would succumb. They had been asked to hold out for forty-eight hours, and now this was the eighth day since the first cannon-shot and the sixth since the battle began, and yet they had resisted without aid, except from Admiral Ronarc'h's marine fusiliers. At Tervaete bend, the enemy was introducing more and more men and actively digging himself in on the left bank, and organizing his position with the aid of numerous machine guns. More and more troops were slipping over the crossings that had been captured, and the German pressure was becoming stronger and stronger.

Under these conditions, the Belgian High Command ordered the chord of the bend to be held at all costs and the ground to be clung to. The Belgian positions now rested at one side on Stuyvekenskerke and at the other on the hamlet of Schoorbakke. Along this line were echeloned from north to south the 4th and 2nd Line Regiments, the grenadiers, the carabiniers, and the 8th Line Regiment. Thanks to superhuman efforts, they resisted the formidable German thrust, in rudimentary trenches, on a terribly flat country bare of all cover. All the available Belgian reserves and artillery supported them. The Belgian batteries near the Dixmude and Boitshoucke cross-roads and behind the railway line manœuvred with ferocious energy. Thus the artillery group of the 3rd Division came from near Nieuport, where, as we have stated, it had taken a brilliant part in the defence, and now supported the centre. It had hardly taken up its position before it was discovered by the Germans. Shells and shrapnel fell round its pieces in reckless profusion. The place became untenable. In order not to alarm the infantry and thus lower their *moral*, the three batteries (60th, 61st, and 62nd) shifted, not to the rear, but forward, and came within 400 yards of the enemy. A captive balloon and aviators at once found its new position. The group remained there under a deluge of projectiles until its losses became too heavy. Then, retiring, gun by gun, with perfect coolness, the men took shelter until night fell. Then the men themselves dragged the guns to the rear without abandoning a single one.

Another artillery group supporting the centre, Captain Tilken's divisional group, paid dearly for the heroism of its men. The whole gun crew of the 10·5-cm. howitzer were either killed or wounded, and eighty-five horses were put out of service. When the group had to leave Schoorbakke, it did so at a walk in perfect order, so as to show the infantry that they could always rely upon it.<sup>1</sup>

The troops holding the chord of the bend of Tervaete were exhausted. They had undergone one hundred and twenty hours' bombardment and three days' fighting without a rest. Nevertheless, the moment they gave up any point in the line, the officers inexorably sent them back to the position they had abandoned for a while.

If the Germans succeeded in getting through at this point, they could in a single rush reach the Dixmude-Nieuport railway, the last

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 70-1.

rampart of the defence. If that line were taken, the game would be up, the coast route lie open to the invaders.

During this terrible day the first French reinforcement at last appeared, some units of Grossetti's (42nd) Division.<sup>1</sup>

But these reinforcements were of no assistance to the troops clinging to their position behind the bend of the Yser. However, four of the French heavy guns—12 cm.—came into action, near Boitshoucke, by the side of the valiant Belgian batteries.

The French 155th Regiment and a chasseur battalion were sent, not to the Schoorbakke–Stuyvekenskerke line, but to Nieuport, where the defenders were at their last gasp.

It will be remembered that on the previous day the 1st Chasseurs and the 9th Line Regiment had advanced towards Lombartzyde, and had succeeded in reaching the outer edge of the village itself. On the morning of the 23rd the Germans made a vigorous attack on these troops, but were repulsed, leaving several prisoners and two machine guns in the hands of the Belgians.

The combat soon began again with great bitterness. Whilst Nieuport was being covered with shells, and the houses of this unfortunate town were crumbling to pieces one after the other, the Germans were continually throwing fresh troops into the fray, forcing the Belgians to give way little by little.

But French reinforcements were arriving. They were seen under shell fire to pass slowly through blazing Nieuport and over the Yser bridges. They soon joined in the *mêlée*, disengaging the Belgians and relieving them on the Lombartzyde–Groote-Bamburgh line. In the evening the position was entirely occupied by the French, who even made some progress on the side of Westende. The harassed Belgians here were able to retire to the rear, and at the same time the arrival of French artillery enabled the Belgian guns to go to the support of the defence of the centre, behind the Schoorbakke–Stuyvekenskerke line.

The situation at Nieuport was therefore improved. Further south, at St.-Georges and the Pont de l'Union, the defenders were subjected to terrific attacks.

In vain at daybreak on the 23rd did a gun hoisted on to the embankment destroy the ruins on the other side of the Yser occupied by the enemy's machine guns. The German bombardment was so violent that even the machine guns commanding the Pont de l'Union were forced to take cover. The firing raged on both banks of the Yser. On the opposite embankment the enemy succeeded in installing machine guns which demolished the parapet of the Belgian trenches. The men of the 7th Line Regiment were forced to repair them, while the best marksmen replied to the enemy fire.

Suddenly enormous shells coming from an unknown direction fell like thunderbolts on the trenches, displacing whole blocks of the embankment, and blowing to atoms the soldiers within the range of their explosion. This was too much. The men were terrified and seized with panic. Major Houart sent an urgent message for an artillery officer to find out where these murderous projectiles came from. Lieutenant Cambrelin ran up, but he had scarcely set foot in

<sup>1</sup> This division was already reduced to 7,500 bayonets when it came to the help of the Belgians.

the trench before one of these shells rolled him over, a bleeding mass. A moment later Major Houart fell, also mortally wounded.

A new German attack was then begun. Germans were seen assembling almost everywhere, a bridge train was on the way to Schoorbakke, and German batteries had taken position behind Mannekensvere.

The few surviving officers tried to keep up the men's courage, but the general situation was so bad that they feared that they would be unable to resist the attack which appeared to be imminent. The commandant of the corps himself came to the trenches and personally addressed the men, asking them to continue their sacrifice to the end. Fortunately, he was able to tell them that they would soon be relieved.

In fact, at 10 p.m. the 14th Line Regiment and a chasseur battalion came up. At midnight the relief had been effected, the heroes of the 7th Line Regiment defiled past the batteries of the 7th Brigade, which were continuing their unwearying task of protecting the Pont de l'Union. They went to La Panne, ragged, covered with mud, and bleeding from wounds, but filled with pride. At the Grand' Place of Furnes the King himself was soon to pin the Cross of the Order of Leopold on the regimental colours. The 7th Line Regiment had held out victoriously for seven days and seven nights. Eighteen officers and 600 men had fallen on the banks of the Yser.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, in front of Dixmude the Germans during the 23rd showed little activity, at least so far as regards infantry attacks. For the bombardment still continued with unabated fury. Bodies buried the day before were exhumed by the explosions, and fell to earth again among those who remained alive, spreading terror. Major Lefèvre asked that his men should be relieved. He went in person to the trenches to keep up the courage of his chasseurs. On the road from Dixmude to Eessen he was knocked down by a bursting shell. As they picked him up, he had only one thought: "If only they hold on!"<sup>2</sup>

They held on, indeed, during the whole day of the 23rd. When darkness fell, the bombardment slackened, and the linesmen of the 12th came and relieved the chasseurs. The latter had been sixty hours in the trenches.

To sum up, on all the positions along the Yser the army still held on, but in the centre, at the Tervaete bend, the situation was extremely grave. The second-line positions which had been prepared along the chord of the bend were still intact, but there could be no illusion as to the morrow. Messages were sent that "the troops are used up, their moral is affected, and they may be taken with panic by any incident." The effectives had decreased in a disquieting manner; the 1st Carabiniers, for example, had only six officers and 325 men left.<sup>3</sup>

The situation was so grave that the Belgian High Command did not hesitate to send to the French Command an urgent request for assistance in the centre. It stated that "energetic action by the greatest possible number of the men of the 42nd Division (engaged near Nieuport) may yet restore the situation."<sup>4</sup>

During the night the Commandant of the French forces in Belgium decided to accede in part to this request. A brigade of the 42nd was

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 51-3.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

to go and reinforce the Belgians at the centre of their line at day-break on the 24th October.

Behind the Belgian front the night was passed in collecting the remains of companies to form a reserve.

On the 24th October<sup>1</sup> the Belgian High Command attempted to restore some kind of order among the units, which had become mixed up and confused during the numerous attacks and counter-attacks of the preceding days. This operation was not easy, for the troops who along the chord of the Tervaete bend were straining every nerve to resist the enemy's forward movement could not be touched. It was necessary to hold out at all costs between Schoorbakke and Stuyvekenkerke, if the French brigade detached from the 42nd Division was to have time to intervene at the centre with effect.

In spite of the heroism of the soldiers defending this line, who were clinging to this almost entirely exposed ground with the energy of despair, the situation soon became critical. The Germans were determined to break the Belgian centre and redoubled their activity. They threw three bridges and three foot-bridges over the Yser at the Tervaete bend. Fresh battalions poured ceaselessly over these crossings, and deployed in the bend on a front stretching from a point about 1,000 yards south of Schoorbakke to a point in front of Tervaete.

Facing them, the Belgian positions ran along the Kleine Beverdyk, behind which were entrenched the 3rd and 2nd Line Regiments, supported on their right by the grenadiers. The 8th and 13th Line Regiments then prolonged the front by way of Stuyvenskerke to the Yser, the embankments of which were held by the 10th Line Regiment.

Under the formidable pressure of the enemy, issuing from the bend of Tervaete in compact masses and extending his action both north and south, Stuyvekenkerke was soon abandoned by its defenders. To the west of Schoorbakke the 1st Division was also forced to give way. This advance by the enemy in two directions gravely compromised the rest of the front. Progress by the Germans to the north-west of Schoorbakke would uncover the right of the 14th Line Regiment, who were holding the Pont de l'Union and the Yser embankments to the south of this crossing, whilst the operation extending southward beyond Stuyvekenkerke would soon imperil the defence of Dixmude.

However, in the centre two battalions of the 9th Line Regiment and two of the 1st Chasseurs à pied succeeded in stemming the German flood at the east of Pervyse, in front of the railway.

In the meantime, the French brigade of the 42nd Division had arrived, and was on the march to Stuyvekenkerke. On their right a grenadier battalion, a carabinier battalion, and the 10th Line Regiment held the paved road leading from Stuyvekenkerke to Oud-Stuyvekenkerke. They stopped the advance of the Germans, who had succeeded in passing the river at this spot, and, being constantly reinforced, were rapidly gaining ground.

At that moment the line of the Yser was forced from the north of Schoorbakke as far as Oud-Stuyvekenkerke, or from the 6th to nearly as far as the 15th boundary stone. On this extended front the Germans were pushing right on towards the Nieuport-Dixmude rail-

<sup>1</sup> On the events of the 24th October see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 80-1, *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 143-5, W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 39-40.

way, and their two flanks, turning north and south, were threatening to envelop the defenders of the Pont de l'Union and Dixmude respectively.

A success of grave consequence soon crowned their efforts in the north. Having crossed the Yser at Schoorbakke, they continued to advance to the north-west, gaining ground by degrees towards St.-Georges. At the same time other troops were redoubling their efforts to force a crossing at the Pont de l'Union. Here the Belgian artillery (Major Van Bever's group) attained the greatest intensity of fire that it had ever done. It had no more to fear from the German heavy guns, for the French artillery had come up and taken them in hand. During the day of the 24th alone, Major Van Bever's three batteries used no fewer than 2,500 to 3,000 shells.<sup>1</sup> Their accurate firing prevented any advance against the bridge during the morning.

But about four o'clock the approach of the Germans coming from Schoorbakke along the left bank of the Yser threatened to take the men of the 14th Line Regiment in reverse. They had to evacuate their trenches and yield up to the enemy the Pont de l'Union, which had been so obstinately defended for seven days. The enemy then crossed the river in masses. St.-Georges was attacked on the east and south-east and became untenable. The Germans were soon in the village.

In an instant the guns of the 28th, 29th, and 44th batteries were dragged by hand forward out of their shelters. Audaciously exposing themselves, they changed front, and at short range opened a rapid fire of explosive shells on the village, which the enemy had just entered, and on the approaches to the Pont de l'Union, where masses of Germans were crowded together to cross. For twenty-five minutes the Belgian gunners fired without ceasing. This intervention had its effect. The Germans were pinned down, and in vain attempted to debouch from St.-Georges, where dead and wounded were piled together among the ruins. The 14th Line Regiment was able to make an orderly retirement on the Noordvaart, protected by a counter-attack by two battalions of the 5th Line Regiment.<sup>2</sup>

The enemy had thus carried the Yser from St.-Georges to Oud-Stuyvekenskerke. The Belgians were driven back to the weak waterfront constituted by the Noordvaart and the Beverdyk.

In the meantime, Colonel Meiser at Dixmude was becoming more and more anxious about his left; would the enemy troops coming from Stuyvekenskerke force the defenders of Dixmude to abandon the bridgehead, as the 14th had had to leave the Pont de l'Union and St.-Georges in the enemy's hands?

The bridgehead was occupied by four companies of marine fusiliers and four Belgian battalions (11th and 12th Line Regiments). The trenches on the left bank were held by marines. In the Oostkerke-Caeskerke district were two battalions of the 11th Line Regiment, two battalions of the 2nd Chasseurs, and also two battalions of the 1st Line Regiment, in reserve.

Hardly had day dawned on the 24th before the situation towards the north was seen to be extremely critical. In front of Oud-Stuyvekenskerke, as we stated, the 10th Line Regiment had had to relinquish

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

the embankments of the Yser and retire to the Stuyvekenskerke—Oud-Stuyvekenskerke road.

This retirement uncovered the left of the marines, who were holding the embankment from near the 16th boundary stone. Their trenches were enfiladed by the enemy. In their turn they had to retire. Everywhere fugitives and wounded men were flowing in groups towards the railway in a state of weariness and discouragement which might easily spread panic. The military police of Meiser's brigade vainly attempted to stop the scattered men in their flight. The German artillery was already shelling Oostkerke and Caeskerke, and it was evident that the enemy was about to press on to the Dixmude—Nieupoort road and on up to the railway, thus cutting the Dixmude defenders off from the rest of the army.<sup>1</sup>

Admiral Ronarc'h and Colonel Meiser needed all the energy of which they were capable to face such an anxious situation.

The admiral sent towards the 16th boundary stone of the Yser a part of the marines whom he held in reserve, with orders to retake the lost ground and to establish a defensive position facing north. Colonel Meiser, on his part, sent towards Oud-Stuyvekenskerke all the reserves he had in hand: one battalion of the 11th Line Regiment, two of the 2nd Chasseurs, and two of the 1st Line Regiment. Supported by some batteries, they all set out in the general direction of Oud-Stuyvekenskerke, the large square church tower of which served as a rallying mark. The chasseurs in particular were to advance from Oud-Stuyvekenskerke towards the Den Torren's and Van de Woude's farms, which were on the left bank of the Yser west of the 14th boundary stone, and served as a base for the German attacks. The battalion of the 11th Line Regiment was the first to move. Led by Captain Decamps, it advanced with great ardour and deployed at the edge of the village, in which the Germans had just obtained a footing, and entrenched itself.

Soon the chasseurs moved off in their turn, supported on the right by the battalions of the 1st Line Regiment and some marines. The bursting shells fired by the German heavy artillery, posted to the west of Beerst, formed a barrage in front of the attacking troops, who nevertheless went forward. Each unit advanced as best it could, using its own initiative. Taking advantage of every little cover which this extremely flat country afforded, the soldiers rushed forward by small sections, and crawled through the mud or crouched in the wet ditches. The ranks were decimated by the enemy artillery and became more and more confused. Still they went on. About 11 a.m. the chasseurs reached the eastern edge of Oud-Stuyvekenskerke. The Germans still occupied the houses of the village, and their rifles and machine guns spread death around.

Everywhere the French and Belgians—linesmen, chasseurs, and marines—moved forward. The 10th Line Regiment on the left, which had lost the village at the beginning of the morning, made a fresh effort and counter-attacked. Under this converging effort the Germans suddenly gave way and retired. Oud-Stuyvekenskerke was recaptured!

The success was costly. In less than two hours the chasseurs had lost thirteen officers and 300 men. Captain Dupuis had fallen at the head of his battalion.

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* p. 112.

Most of these units had lost their leaders, and their officers and men were terribly reduced in numbers. All needed to be overhauled in order to continue their task. At this critical time the Germans concentrated on the village they had abandoned the fire of their heavy guns. The massive tower of the church melted away under the shock of the heavy projectiles, and was soon no more than a tiny needle.

The surviving officers nevertheless at this moment rallied the chasseurs and led them to the attack of Van de Woude's and Den Torren's farms, east of which the Germans had thrown a new foot-bridge over the Yser. The marines and the 1st Line Regiment supported the movement. Step by step the columns progressed over the miry ground, which was cut up by many streamlets, and got within about 600 yards of the two farms.

There their impetuous advance was broken. Mowed down by machine guns, whole ranks disappeared—chasseurs, linesmen, and marines were scattered in this place of death.

The sacrifice had not been in vain. The Germans were no longer advancing either, and the menace to the north of Dixmude was removed. A barrier was now established against the enemy's pressure to the south.<sup>1</sup> It extended from the 5th boundary stone of the Nieuport-Dixmude railway, passed through Oud-Stuyvekenskerke and in front of Den Torren's and Van de Woude's farms, and rejoined the 15th boundary stone of the Yser. A second line of resistance was established somewhat to the rear, passing through Roode Poort farm and the group of houses called Burg, up to the 16th boundary stone on the river. Thence the trenches of the marines ran along the Yser towards Dixmude. The rest of the army had succeeded in maintaining its positions behind the Beverdyk and the Noordvaart as far as Nieuport.

Whilst the valour of chasseurs, linesmen, and marines was thus thwarting, at the cost of heavy losses, the threat to encircle Dixmude on the left bank of the Yser, the bridgehead on the right bank had been itself subjected to a severe test. From the early hours of the morning each of the German batteries had selected a section of trench, and proceeded to bombard it methodically by successive shots from right to left and from left to right, finishing up with a salvo from all six guns along the length of front to be demolished.

This inexorable bombardment destroyed the trenches and demoralized the men, and when an attack was launched at ten o'clock against the south-eastern trenches, the defenders flinched and abandoned their positions. Colonel Jacques at once came in person to order them to retake the almost demolished trenches. The remains of Collyns's battalion—the men of the combat of Visé—rushed forward, and with the support of some three hundred or four hundred marines wrested from the enemy the trenches he had only captured for a moment.

About 2 p.m. Colonel Meiser, who was so ill as to be unable to stand, yielded to the advice of his doctors and left Dixmude. Colonel Jacques took his place.

All the afternoon the bombardment continued with the utmost violence. Caeskerke, Oostkerke and the Belgian batteries were

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 113-14; "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 9th November 1915.

drenched with shells. The losses among the gunners were very heavy. At four o'clock in the afternoon numerous movements of German troops were noticed at Vladsloo, Eessen, and Woumen; considerable forces were being concentrated. Doubtless the enemy would attempt a night attack.

Happily, both Belgians and French were in a position to give them a good reception. Abundant supplies of cartridges had arrived, and also lubricants to grease the movements of the machine guns, which had suffered much from excessive usage.

The evening of the 24th October slowly advanced. In the twilight every one was getting ready to repel the assault, which they knew must be formidable.<sup>1</sup> Everywhere the sky was red with the reflection of fires. Dixmude was nearly consumed, the small village of Caeskerke was in flames, the tower of its blazing church still rising above the poor, crazy houses; Pervyse, Stuyvekenkerke, and Oud-Stuyvekenkerke were burning like torches. The Yser was giving forth torrents of black smoke, which rose from the burning petrol turned into the river from the tanks established at the 16th boundary.

The 24th October was a terrible day for the Belgian army. But the situation with the Germans was far from brilliant, as is shown by the diary of an officer of the 202nd Reserve Regiment who was killed on the 27th before Oud-Stuyvekenkerke. We read there:—

24th October 1914.—The fight continued. We are trying to cross the Yser. 5.45 departure: engineering material to be prepared, and pontoons. We then march quickly over the country in front of us, over ditches and through the intense fire of the enemy. I am hit on the back under the neck, but not wounded. We take up a position near Van de Woude's farm, where we take cover against the fearful artillery fire of the enemy. Hiding ourselves as we go, we reach the fifth trench. Some artillery was there, and firing began. We know nothing about the general situation. I have no idea where the enemy is, nor what strength he has, and there is no means of getting information. In the other lines they are also suffering heavy losses, which are certainly out of all proportion to the results we obtain. The enemy artillery is too strong and too well sheltered, and as it is not kept under by our artillery, which is not so strong, an infantry advance is of no avail, and only brings about heavy and useless losses.

The help given to the wounded leaves much to be desired. At Dixmude more than forty were left on the ground without any attention. The sanitary companies are kept useless on the other side of the Yser. It is equally impossible to get regular supplies of food and water. For several days we have had no hot food. The bread, etc., is hardly sufficient. The emergency rations are exhausted. The water is very bad, quite green, but it is drunk, as no other is obtainable. Man is reduced to the state of a beast. I myself have nothing to eat, as I left everything in my saddle with the horse. We received no orders what to do on this side of the Yser, and were not told that our horses must remain on the right bank. That is the reason why we are not provided. I live on what men give me out of comradeship; men wish to share with me like comrades, but the share-out is very small, for want of the wherewithal. One cannot think of changing clothes or linen. I am in a shocking plight.

Farms and villages are burning everywhere: what a sad sight to see this magnificent district in ruins, strewn thick with wounded and dead.<sup>2</sup>

The night of the 24th October was an awful one for the defenders of Dixmude. Hardly had darkness fallen before an attack was loosed against the north sector of the position. It was repulsed. Almost simultaneously, the southern sector was assailed with great violence.

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 114–15.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 10th November 1914.



Here, too, the Germans won no success. At each attempt of the enemy the Belgian batteries by a systematic barrage fire made a screen in front of the adversary, and their marvellous activity roused the enthusiasm of the infantrymen. But the Germans seemed to be animated by the obstinacy of despair. It would seem that they had concentrated fresh troops in front of Dixmude, and that they had been ordered to take the bridgehead at all costs. Their tenacity was astounding. Each time they came on in following waves, drunk with blood and uttering wild yells, but each time the marines and the Belgian linesmen threw them back in disorder. Stumbling over corpses, trampling on the wounded, animated by a kind of mystic madness which gave their faces a frightful expression, they returned to the charge. Sometimes a few of them reached the parapet of the trenches. Then the defenders beat them down with butt-ends or stabbed them with bayonets, and their bodies were seen to fall heavily.

In the north and east sectors the assailants thus came back eleven times; in the southern sector fifteen attacks were launched. But the Belgians and French, with every man in the line without a single reserve in hand, held fast, and yielded not one inch of ground. At last the Germans, having suffered bloody losses, came to their last gasp and returned to take shelter in their lines a few hundred yards from the Franco-Belgian positions.

Dixmude remained inviolate.<sup>1</sup>

The day of the 25th<sup>2</sup> opened in comparative calm and marks a pause in the enemy's movement. The Germans were obviously exhausted. The bombardment was less violent and the infantry attacks were rare and not pushed home.

In the north, in the St.-Georges and Nieuport region, most of the Belgian batteries, which had taken so active a part in the defence, withdrew behind the railway and took up positions round about Ramscapelle. These were the batteries of the 5th and 7th mixed brigades and the 45th battery. The group of the 6th Brigade took up a position north of Boitshoucke. In spite of the retirement of the artillery, it was decided that detachments of the 6th Line Regiment should attempt the recapture of St.-Georges during the 25th.

The troops for this attack concentrated during the night behind the embankment of the Nieuport-Ramscapelle road. They had a curious equipment, which was common at this time to all the Belgian troops holding the Yser. Instead of a haversack, almost all the soldiers carried a "baluchon," a kind of sack made of coarse grey cloth. They had all kinds of flasks, bottles, and cans carried on the bandolier or hung on in the most curious ways, by strings, laces, etc. The uniforms had nothing uniform but the name." The soldiers who had come from Antwerp bareheaded had provided themselves with caps, some—the "escaped" from Holland—were in civilian clothes from head to foot, many were wearing sabots.<sup>3</sup>

The detachments of the 6th Line Regiment marched on St.-

<sup>1</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 115-16.

<sup>2</sup> For the events of [the 25th October see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 80-2, *a campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 146-7, and W. Breton, op. cit. p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Captain Jacoby, "Mon bataillon devant St.-Georges" (24th, 25th, and 26th October 1914), in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 2nd December 1915.

Georges during the night of the 24th October. The first platoon, under Lieutenant Jacoby, followed the highroad from Nieuport to St.-Georges; the second went along the left bank of the Yser.

This night march has been related in a very picturesque manner by Lieutenant Jacoby himself.

. . . We arrive at the bend in the road at the 344 mark.

A cry of "Halt."

"A patrol of Sub-Lieutenant Mendrain which has gone astray," say I to my men. We take a few more steps, crouching down in the ditch by the road. . . . We cough. . . .

A new cry, in German this time, "Wer da?"

As there is no reply and we keep on the quiet, twenty or thirty rifles let loose a volley of very noisy bullets. They whistle over our heads, high in the air. The storm lasts a few moments and at last dies away shot by shot.

Suddenly I heard in the distance behind me the deep voice of Captain Vanniesbecq, who was swearing and storming in an unusual manner.

"Damned lot of rotters! Are you trying to run away under your officer's very nose?"

Doubtless my platoon, left to itself, had turned back under the volley of the Boche rifles.

I rushed to find them.

Adjutant Hens leads the platoon back to the attack. They are all astounded to see me again. The soldiers march in siles, quite ashamed of their escapade. The adjutant tells me that they had reached the company commander in a fright and out of breath, shouting that they were being pursued by squadrons of uhlans and that their lieutenant had been left in the hands of the Boches.

We approach the fatal turning. You would think that the platoon was marching on tip-toe. One great fellow in the front rank shows me a uhlan; what he points at is really a bush moving in the wind! I reassure the great fool, and with a thousand precautions I extend the platoon into open order in the meadow to the right of the road.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the support of the Belgian artillery, which began to shell St.-Georges, the Belgian movement was stopped by the violent fire of the enemy, who soon took the men of the 6th in reverse. The columns of attack were recalled, and retired to the place where the roads from Nieuport to St.-Georges and Ramscapelle respectively cross. They were there at daybreak on the 25th October.

About 8 a.m. a counter-attack was ordered. It was carried out under the protection of a motor machine gun. But the onrush of the assailants was stopped dead by violent firing, and the Germans rushed from their trenches and took Lieutenant Barret and several of his men prisoner. About 11 a.m. the enemy's heavy guns opened a violent bombardment which lasted till night. The counter-attack of the Belgians on St.-Georges was frustrated, and they were ordered to retire behind the railway, and at the same time the news reached them that the French had been forced to abandon Lombartzyde.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime the Germans no longer advanced in the centre. The diary of the German officer, already quoted, contains these remarks under the date of the 25th:—

Fighting continues all day long. We receive no definite orders. No one would imagine that this was Sunday. Infantry and artillery fighting continues, but without any result. Nothing but losses.<sup>3</sup> . . .

<sup>1</sup> See the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 4th December 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Jacoby, *op. cit.*, in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 7th December 1915.

<sup>3</sup> *Courrier de l'Armée* for 10th November 1914.

The Belgian chasseurs, who had, in concert with other troops, succeeded the day before in forming a barrier north of Dixmude, and were entrenched in front of Den Torren's and Van de Woude's farms, passed a terrible day. Though the exhausted enemy did not attack, his artillery barred with its implacable fire the open space over which supplies would have to reach the chasseurs. They were resigned and made no complaint, but remained stoically at their post. When men fell, hit by the machine-gun fire, their comrades muttered, "Their troubles are over!"

In the barn and stable of a small farm, where the staff of the regiment were housed, there were crowds of wounded men. It was impossible to evacuate them, as the enemy were ceaselessly shelling the ground behind the Belgian trenches. The surgeon, the chaplain, and the ambulance staff did their utmost. To quench the thirst of the delirious men in agony they had to boil the stagnant water of the brooks.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless here the Belgians, wishing to profit by the weariness of the enemy, attempted an attack on the left flank of the troops deployed in front of the Belgian centre. Launched from Oud-Stuyvekenskerke, and led by the 83rd French Brigade and the men of the 5th Division, it was unable to attain its objective, and broke down before the obstinate resistance of the enemy.

Lastly, by Dixmude, the day did not pass without fighting. The first light of day showed a horrible scene at this place. In front of the Franco-Belgian trenches, so furiously attacked by the enemy during the night, German corpses lay by hundreds among remnants of arms and uniforms. Wounded men dragged themselves along or attempted to disentangle themselves from among the dead.

While searching some ruined dwellings near some of the trenches, the Belgian patrols discovered about fifty enemy infantrymen, young volunteers who had just left Germany, and for whom Dixmude had been their first engagement. Among them was an officer whose arrogant air contrasted strongly with the frightened attitude of his men. He was searched, and dum-dum bullets were found on him. He was at once taken to Admiral Ronarc'h near Caeskerke halt. Taking advantage of a moment's inattention, he tried to run away, but a marine shot him down.<sup>2</sup>

The enemy artillery still continued to bombard the bridgehead. The situation in the trenches became awful. It rained in torrents, and the rain transformed the ground into a mass of sticky mud. The men were shivering with cold, and their freezing hands almost refused to hold their rifles.

As dark came on, two bayonet attacks, started from the Eessen road, were repulsed. The night fell, black and impenetrable. Suddenly, about one in the morning, near the Eessen road, some seventy Germans, led by a major, called Von Oidtmann, darted out of the darkness, and, in spite of the fire directed on them by the 11th Line Regiment, doubled along the road, driving everything in front of them.

<sup>1</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes du 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied," in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 11th November 1915.

<sup>2</sup> W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 116-17.

They rushed to Dixmude, and entered the abandoned town in a body. They reached the Grand' Place, and there attempted to cause a panic by firing and shouting. But all was silent and empty. Only a few stray soldiers, surprised by this unexpected band of Germans, were made prisoners as they passed. Passing through the ruins of the town, the troop of invaders reached the Yser bridge. This was guarded by the marines, but before they could ascertain in the darkness whether these were enemies or fugitives, the head of the column had already passed them. Cries rose: "The Boches! They're Boches!" At once a machine gun was turned on to the mass pressing on to the bridge and fired into them. Some of the Germans fell, and all who had not crossed the river turned and re-entered Dixmude, hiding in the cellars. These fugitives were rounded up at daybreak. However, the portion of the troop that had succeeded in crossing the bridge continued its hurried course through the night along the Caeskerke road, with the major at the head, trumpets sounding the charge, and the men shouting "Gloria! Gloria! Victoria!"

At the house where Colonel Jacques's staff was stationed, their approach was heard, and all lights were extinguished. The yelling mob went by without noticing anything. But opposite there was a French receiving station which remained lit up. A volley was directed at it, killing a marine lieutenant, a surgeon, and a chaplain.

The Germans, continuing their journey, reached the Caeskerke level-crossing. There they ran into a barrier which there had been time to prepare. Marines were entrenched here, and received the enemy with a brisk fire. The Germans at once jumped into the fields close by. They still kept their prisoners with them; under threats of death they demanded that the latter should tell them where the Belgian batteries were placed. The guns were hardly a hundred yards away, but none of the prisoners would say a word. The angry Germans blew out the brains of some of the recalcitrants.

The band still wandered on, groping in the dark without the least idea where they were. When day dawned they were scattered everywhere in small detachments, who let themselves be surrounded and surrendered. In the middle of a field a small group held out while the major was having some of his prisoners, whom he still held, shot. A bayonet thrust laid the wretch dead. Part of his men were killed, the rest captured. Some of the prisoners were, after inquiry held, convicted of assassination. Admiral Ronarc'h had them shot after a summary trial.<sup>1</sup>

Thus ended this extraordinary adventure, which in some respects recalls the raid of the enemy on General Leman's Headquarters at Liège.

On the evening of the 25th October the Belgian army had maintained its positions on the Noordvaart and the Beverdyk; beyond that it still held Oud-Stuyvekenskerke and the Yser embankment from the 15th boundary to Dixmude. Moreover, the two bridgeheads of Nieuport and Dixmude were still in its hands.

<sup>1</sup> On this episode see W. Breton, *op. cit.* pp. 118-20, Ch. le Goffic, *Dixmude*, already cited, and particularly Dr. Van der Ghinst, "Quatre heures chez les Boches," in *Récits de combattants*, pp. 275-85, and Lieutenant Wilde, "Huit jours à Dixmude," *ibid.*, pp. 270-3.

Advantage was taken of the relative quiet to reconstitute the companies, and an attempt was made to give some cohesion to the larger units. The number of casualties was considerable. According to one report: "At 6 p.m. 9,145 wounded men had been evacuated by railway; the number of the wounded who were receiving attention on the spot, added to those who died while being taken to the casualty clearing stations, is estimated at 1,000. To these must be added the number lying dead on the field, wounded not brought in, and the missing."<sup>1</sup>

The possibility of a retirement on the railway, and the need to form a serious obstacle in front of this line of defence, was borne in mind. It was then that the Belgian High Command began to consider the inundation of the ground between the railway embankment and the dikes of the Yser.

Without discussing, what is really a minor question, who first conceived the idea<sup>2</sup> of flooding the position between the Yser and the railway, it is necessary to call attention to the numerous difficulties which this operation presented.

It was essential that the flooding should not involve Furnes and the cantonments of the Belgian troops. To effect this it was necessary to stop up the conduits and breaches in the railway embankment of the Nieupoort-Dixmude line.

These works were begun at 4 p.m. on the 25th. As soon as the barrier was formed, it was necessary to open the locks at Nieupoort and divert the sea basins of Old Nieupoort into the Beverdyk so as to flood progressively the ground occupied by the German lines. To do this the sluice-gates had to be worked for several days, raising them at the flood and lowering them at the ebb.<sup>3</sup> This dangerous work, which had to be carried out close to the German lines, was executed by two young officers, Captains Thys and Ulmo, of the engineers, assisted by the lock-keeper and about ten men provided with levers to work the locks.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> There are different versions: the first attributes the idea to Captain Nuytens, and says that Kogge, the old lock-keeper, gave very valuable advice (see P. Nothomb, "La Bataille de l'Yser," in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for 15th September 1915, p. 324). The second agrees with the first in this sense, that it attributes the idea to the Belgian Staff. The lock-keeper would have nothing to do with it, and was only induced to help by the promise of a decoration (see E. Van der Velde, "La bataille de l'Yser," in *The Nineteenth Century* for March 1916, p. 590). Lastly, a third version is given by an English officer, Mr. Bartle C. Frere, who wrote from Egypt to *The Times* a letter in which he says that the idea was suggested by a document preserved among the papers of M. Emeric Feys, a magistrate at Furnes. "The precious document," says the English officer, "which showed what could be done to aid in holding back a flood of Germans by producing a flood of water, has been in the possession of M. Feys and his forbears ever since it was drawn up in 1793 with a view to the defence of Nieupoort against invaders of another race. . . . I am writing from a distance, and time does not permit of consulting him before doing so; but I feel sure that the distinguished General Wielemans, Sous-Chef de l'Etat Major of the Belgian Army, and with myself a guest of M. Feys in those days, would have corroborated the statements with which I here venture to trouble you regarding a document which both he and I saw among M. Feys's treasured family archives" (*The Times*, 19th February 1916). These versions can probably be easily reconciled. The Belgian Staff, having decided to flood the area, may have been greatly assisted in its technical execution by the document produced by M. Feys.

<sup>3</sup> P. Nothomb, *La Bataille de l'Yser*, loc. cit.; E. Van der Velde, *La Bataille de l'Yser*, loc. cit.

It was on the afternoon of the 28th when, the preparations being complete, the locks were opened.<sup>1</sup>

The inundation must not be pictured as a flood of water sweeping in mighty waves on to the surprised Germans and drowning them in its current. It was slow and cunning work. Several days were required to form on a front of six leagues a vast artificial lagoon, 4 to 5 kilometres in breadth and scarcely 3 to 4 feet deep.

At first there were no visible results, and the superior officers every moment made anxious enquiries as to the success and progress of the operation. Then the soil became gradually softer. Soon there was mud a foot deep, then two feet, then three and even more, sticking to the feet of the invader, sucking him down and covering him with a moving shroud.

On the 26th October<sup>2</sup> a new danger complicated the situation of the Belgian army, which was already sufficiently grave. From the commencement of the battle the Belgian batteries had attempted to make up for the numerical inferiority of the troops and to balance the superiority of the enemy in heavy artillery by their vigorous action. Consequently many of these admirable small guns had become un-serviceable through excessive use, and the reserve of ammunition was very low. There remained 161 shells apiece for the guns of the 6th Division, 100 for the 2nd, and 90 for the 4th.

Yet with these feeble means they were about to resist new attacks.

In the early hours of the morning, on the left and centre of the Belgian front, the Noordvaart-Beverdyk line had to be abandoned. The enemy was exerting violent pressure everywhere, and had succeeded in enfilading the defence. Step by step the defending force retired to the railway embankment. Once there, they had to resist to the death. It was the last barrier on the road to Calais and Dunkirk.

It was almost demanding the impossible from these men in rags, muddy and covered with blood and ready to drop from exhaustion. Yet, realizing the importance of the position, they summoned up their last energies and resisted the attacks at the price of great exertion. In more than one place, overcome by numbers, they gave way, but only to drag themselves forward again, encouraged by their officers. They clung to their ground thus in intense agony, fighting against exhaustion. Men of the 42nd French Division and battalions of French territorials supported these desperate efforts.<sup>3</sup>

The Germans also began to come to the end of their strength. The disorder which reigned in their units was enough to show that they had almost reached their limit of attainment.

The diary of the German officer stationed near Van de Woude's farm, which is not far from Oud-Stuyvekenskerke, says:—

In front of and directed at us, an uninterrupted fusillade. A bridge is going to be built over the Yser, for a bridge has again been destroyed by the enemy's artillery. The situation is unchanged. No progress, in spite of incessant fighting, in spite of the roar of the guns and the shrieks of human lives offered up in vain.

<sup>1</sup> P. Nothomb, *La Bataille de l'Yser*, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> For the events of the 26th October see *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 82, and *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 147-9.

<sup>3</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 40-1.

The infantry can do nothing until the artillery has annihilated the adversary's guns. The losses everywhere must be enormous. Our company has already lost heavily. Our colonel, our battalion commander, and many other officers are wounded and several of them are already dead. . . . Our regiment is inextricably mixed up with other regiments. There is not a battalion or a company which knows where the other parts of its unit are. Everything is in confusion under this terrible fire which enfilades us everywhere. There are many francs-tireurs. Our 2nd battalion is to be placed under the orders of Cyckortz's regiment, which is composed of miscellaneous units. Our old regiment is completely dispersed.

The situation is terrible: to be under machine-gun fire without a pause, and to know nothing about the enemy or one's own troops. . . . This cannot last long. I am desperate.<sup>1</sup>

These lines prove that the troops barring the German advance on Dixmude by the left bank still held fast. Under their protection, Meiser's brigade and the marines occupied with the same vigilance the trenches of the bridgehead.

After the night alarm and the exploit of the German major and his men towards Caeskerke, calm returned. But the German bombardment still continued.

The men of the 11th and 12th Line Regiments had reached the utmost limit of their physical and moral powers of resistance. Fortunately, at eight o'clock Admiral Ronarc'h informed Colonel Jacques that two Senegalese battalions would soon relieve them. The fire of the German batteries was, however, so murderous that the black troops could only advance slowly along the Caeskerke road. They had to take advantage of every lull in the firing to slip over to the right bank of the Yser. At the beginning of the afternoon they brought in from under the ruins of a shattered house some ten more Germans, half-dead with exhaustion. These were the last fugitives of the adventure of the night before.

It was not till 11 p.m. that the glorious survivors of the 11th and 12th Line Regiments were at last able to leave the trenches of Dixmude. On the evening of the 29th October they entered Furnes, singing. At midnight Colonel Jacques departed, the last man to leave, after handing over to the colonel of the Senegalese the command of the bridgehead. Some detachments of Meiser's brigade, however, were still in the trenches along the Yser until the 29th and 30th October.<sup>2</sup>

The same evening (26th) the chasseurs, who had stopped the German rush on Oud-Stuyvekenskerke and remained facing the enemy in front of Den Torren's and Van de Woude's farms, were also relieved. The few hundred men still left in the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 2nd Chasseurs took the Oostkerke road. They were terribly tired, and their column moved very slowly along the road, which was ploughed up by shell-holes. They were ragged and dirty, but they still kept their proud spirit. Did they not take with them all of their sick and wounded who could not be evacuated before? At the rear came some men carrying, on an improvised stretcher, the body of Lieutenant Stouthuyzen—already dead. He had been hit by a bullet while exposing himself in order to get a better view of the enemy's attack.<sup>3</sup>

When night fell, the Belgian army had succeeded in holding the

<sup>1</sup> See the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 10th November 1914.

<sup>2</sup> W. Breton, op. cit. pp. 120-1.

<sup>3</sup> "Pages de gloire. Quelques fastes de 2<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied" in the *Courrier de l'Armée* for 13th November 1915.

Nieuport bridgehead. From there its positions followed the railway embankment as far as the 5th limit mark, then bent back towards Oud-Stuyvekenskerke, taking in Roode Poort farm, to reach the Yser at the 16th boundary. They then ran along the dike as far as the Dixmude bridgehead. To be ready for any emergency on the morrow, the High Command stationed the two cavalry divisions on the various bridges of the canal from Furnes to Loo.<sup>1</sup>

This significant measure—cover and protection for a retreat—indicated that nobody meant to trust to illusory hopes.

Unlike the previous days, the 27th and 28th October were relatively calm.<sup>2</sup> The Germans must have been worn out, and they were probably reorganizing their units, which had become mixed up together during their incessant attacks. They were reserving their efforts in order to deliver a decisive blow.

During the 26th October, Emperor William arrived at the German General Headquarters at Thielt. His presence indicated that the decisive moment in the German thrust on the Yser had arrived, and no doubt he gave orders that the resistance of the Belgians and their Allies must be ended at the price of any sacrifice. Preparation for the final assault probably explains the enemy's relative inactivity for two whole days.

That does not mean that the Germans contented themselves with a mere intermittent bombardment of the Belgian positions. During the night of the 26th they launched two more attacks against the Nieuport-Dixmude railway line, one near Boitshoucke halt and the other against Tervaete station. At Boitshoucke halt the 4th Line Regiment made an energetic resistance from its position; the fire of the 1st Grenadiers stopped the other attack. In front of Ramscapelle German patrols were content with reconnoitring the situation—this was the spot where the Germans were soon to attempt to pierce the line and capture the railway.

During the 27th October, therefore, the activity of the enemy infantry was more apparent than real. Nor was the German bombardment so general as on previous days. It concentrated on points where the coming attacks would apparently be made: Nieuport, Ramscapelle, Pervyse, the approaches of Roode Poort farm, and Dixmude.

The respite granted to the Belgian army was utilized in reforming the reserve as much as possible. The troops in the second line (3rd and 6th Divisions), who had been sent into the front line during the critical days of the 25th and 26th, were withdrawn. During this operation the great diminution in the effectives could be realized.

The nucleus of the infantry regiments had for the most part fallen to 1,000 men. There was no question of filling these gaps. One can therefore imagine the anxiety with which the superior officers every moment scanned the ground to discover the first traces of the inundation. It seemed to them that the ground was becoming softer and that the mud was getting more liquid and sticky. But yet it was so little. The new ally was very slow in coming.

Since the day the English flotilla made its first appearance on the Flemish coast during the fighting at Lombartzyde, it had never ceased

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, pp. 82-3.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 83, and *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 149-51.



to harass with its fire the flank of the Germans which rested on the sea. The latter tried to reply to the flotilla by bringing into positions on the dunes guns of great calibre.

To counterbalance this powerful artillery, the British Admiralty, on the 27th October, sent the *Venerable*, an armour-plated vessel of 15,000 tons, with four 30-cm. and twelve 15-cm. guns. The French and English bombardment now stretched along the whole coast as far as Ostend.<sup>1</sup>

A witness thus describes the bombarding flotilla, as he saw it from Coxyde :—

"In front of me, at a distance easy to estimate . . . the dark shapes of several warships proceeded in single file. . . . I recognized an armoured vessel, several monitors, and many destroyers. The weather was dull, it was raining, and the sea was choppy. Each ship fired at a target which had been carefully selected. She fired three or four shells, one after the other, and then steamed out to sea. Her place was soon taken by another vessel. Three or four flashes would then shine against the grey of the horizon, and then the firing would cease for a minute, only to begin again, methodical and implacable.

"Sometimes a jet of water would spring up round these vessels, produced by a German shell. The nearest ship would go a little farther off, and the firing begin again. For three days and three nights the British fleet has not ceased firing, and its shells, falling with precision into the enemy trenches, have caused frightful damage there."<sup>2</sup>

About ten o'clock in the evening of the 27th the enemy sent new troops to make an attack on a narrow front. They were easily repulsed. The assailants returned at daybreak at Ramscapelle, at Pervyse, at the 5th limit mark of the railway, and at Dixmude. They had no better success than during the night. These were no longer dense masses rushing forward with desperate courage and returning ten or fifteen times to the charge. At the most some enemy troops succeeded in getting between Stuyvekenskerke and Oud-Stuyvekenskerke during the 28th. Attacks properly so called ceased on that day. The German batteries concentrated their fire on the Belgian centre, at Pervyse.

It must not be supposed from this that the Belgian troops enjoyed a refreshing rest during these two less critical days. The furious attacks of the enemy on the previous days had damaged most of the trenches; many had been almost levelled by the incessant bombardment, others had fallen in or become mere mud-holes owing to the rain. Attempts were made to put them into some sort of condition.

The number of wounded not yet evacuated was also great, and the lull was at once utilized to take them to the rear and to the clearing stations. Lastly, the men were starving, and the slackening of the bombardment rendered it easier to bring up supplies. Moreover, the night-time, so suitable for surprises, required a vigilant watch to be kept. As the soldiers were depressed and somewhat demoralized, the least alarm might have caused dangerous panics.

<sup>1</sup> J. Buchan, op. cit. iv. pp. 62-3.

<sup>2</sup> See *Le Journal* (Paris) for 2nd November 1914, article entitled "La bataille de Dixmude."

Relief was impossible, as there were not enough reserves. Some of the men had remained for twelve days where night had found them: in the midst of the mud near unhealthy swamps, in a lamentable state of destitution. Many soldiers were shaking with fever, and had nothing to relieve them but the contaminated water of the ditches. The cold October nights chilled them, and their ragged uniforms, drenched by the rain, could give them no warmth. As they had not had their boots off for weeks, their feet were swollen and men were forced to cut off their boots, or whatever served for such, and, in defiance of hygiene, stand in the mud on their burning feet.

They too cast searching glances at the ground between them and the German trenches, and tried to see whether the inundation was making any progress. The officers had told them of this last means of defence, and tried to keep up the men's spirits by the prospect of this help from natural causes.

Towards the end of the day, on the 28th, the first signs of the inundation became visible: slowly but surely the waters began to rise in front of the 2nd Division, the nearest to the Nieuport locks.<sup>1</sup>

The Germans resumed their activity on the 29th. It was the prelude of a vigorous thrust by the Duke of Würtemberg's army, encouraged by the presence of the Kaiser in person. The German batteries again came into action with great vigour and prepared the ground for the infantry attack.

The latter was delivered against the front held by the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Divisions. Great masses of assailants appeared before the trenches between Boitshoucke halt and Pervyse station with the obvious intention of piercing the Belgian centre and laying hands on the railway. The first assault was delivered at 10 a.m. The men of the 4th Line Regiment repulsed it.

In the afternoon the Germans came on again with still more fury. Mustering up all their energy, the Belgians defending the railway again threw them back. They were powerfully assisted by the 151st French Regiment.

The struggle was very bitter for three hours. The principal mass of the enemy was held up by the 3rd and 4th Line Regiments; in the end their ranks broke, thus involving the retreat of the other detachments. At 5 p.m. the enemy retired to his lines.

This action presaged a more powerful blow on the morrow. In fact, on the 30th October the German thrust was resumed with great violence against the whole front of the Allies from the sea to La Bassée. No doubt, acting on the orders of the Kaiser, who arrived that day, Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria had on the 26th October informed his men that a final smashing blow was necessary, and on the 30th October General Von Deimling said in an Army Order that the moment for piercing the Allies' line had arrived.<sup>2</sup>

On the Belgian front the action began at dawn. The Germans had probably become aware of the plan for the inundation, and realized its full bearing. Since the day before, the water had stretched along the front of the 2nd Division and was gaining more and more towards the south.<sup>3</sup> It had therefore become necessary to carry the railway at

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 83.

all costs, hold on there, and force the defenders of Dixmude and Nieuport to yield up the bridgeheads, and thus upset the calculations of the Belgian Staff.

Preceded and protected by an intense bombardment, the infantry attack was launched at dawn. The men of the 3rd and 22nd Reserve Army Corps rushed forward with savage energy. They knew that the Kaiser was there, and wished the obstinate resistance of the French and Belgians at their Yser position to be broken that day, and the Calais road to be opened.

The enemy swarmed up to the railway, pushing back the extenuated defenders little by little. At 7 a.m. in two places they were only a few yards from the objective they coveted so much. The 5th and 6th Line Regiments near Ramscapelle, and the 10th Line Regiment on the height of Oud-Stuyvekenskerke, saw the assailants rushing to the conquest of the railway line, uttering shouts of triumph.

Suddenly the trenches of the 5th Line Regiment were covered by a rain of hand-grenades. The men there were blinded by the explosions. Before they could recover from their surprise the Germans had sprung forward and were on the railway. The enemy's machine guns soon enfiladed the position with their murderous volleys. The Belgians were overwhelmed and fell back. Before they could reform a new enemy thrust was made, and there they were along the Ramscapelle road in the midst of resounding "Hochs!" and cheers. The village was soon in their hands. The line was pierced, and the road to Furnes, which stood up yonder against the morning light, was open.

To complete the misfortune, the artillery of the 2nd Division had only sixty shells per gun left. In this terrible situation, the 5th and 6th Line Regiments summoned up their last efforts and launched a mad counter-attack. It succeeded, and the Germans were held in the village.<sup>1</sup>

Still Ramscapelle was the only point where the line was pierced.

Farther south the German attack met with nothing but failure. Two hundred and fifty prisoners fell into the hands of the 3rd Division; the 10th Line Regiment nailed their assailants to the ditches; the 4th Division remained victoriously in its positions. At the last-named point the situation of the artillery was as precarious as in the district held by the 2nd Division. Of twenty-three guns only twelve were in a condition to be fired, and the ammunition was reduced to 150 shells.<sup>2</sup>

If the assaults had continued all day, there is no knowing what might have happened. But the German losses had been too bloody. After 10 a.m. the enemy ceased to move. An hour later the Belgians attempted to retake Ramscapelle. The 6th Line Regiment, a battalion of the 7th Line Regiment, two French battalions (6th of the Algerian Sharpshooters and the 16th French Chasseur battalion) and two companies of the 14th of the Line were entrusted with this operation. The 6th Line Regiment succeeded in advancing and establishing themselves six hundred yards from the village. During this time, the Belgian artillery fired without ceasing shrapnel and shells which burst on the enemy's positions. The Franco-Belgian reinforcements were

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

busily collected without haste or bustle, and converged almost mathematically on the village.

About 4 p.m. a new assault, supported by a battalion of the 7th Line Regiment, enabled the Franco-Belgian forces to take some houses on the western edge of Ramscapele. The fight went on till the evening. Then the trumpet again sounded the charge, and French and Belgian rushed at the houses of the village, from which the German machine guns vomited forth death. There was terrible hand-to-hand bayonet fighting.<sup>1</sup>

Here is an episode related by an officer who had to take by assault the mill of Ramscapele, at the head of a company of the 6th Line Regiment:—

From dawn till dusk, without food or drink in the midst of a raging bombardment the company, almost without cover, burned all its ammunition behind a little parapet, sometimes firing at the defenders of the mill of Ramscapele and sometimes at those who were believed to be to the right of the village by the bank of the railway.

At nightfall, when the French bugles sounded the charge and ours replied, the II/2, like the other companies of the 6th, came out of its trench and marched on the mill, which made, with its two great dilapidated sails, desperate signs of the cross in the darkness.

"The devil of a mill!" said our men. "It's grinding bullets. . . ."

In fact the air was vibrating in a sinister fashion—tap! tap! tap! . . . The soil of the road was lit up . . . soldiers were falling without uttering a sound.

The great mill, which scented death to numbers, made quicker and quicker signs of the cross, pointing out to us the gutted church tower.

The bugle still blared. . . . The company went on. Men were falling dead . . . and the cursed mill still kept pouring forth bullets from its loopholes. When one listened, the infernal noise was sounding all round the village.

The bugle died away . . . ta-ra-ta-ra . . . ra . . . no more power to go on. . . . How much further was it? It was absolutely necessary to calculate, to halt and survey the front before we reached these German devils. The II/2 had only one parcel of cartridges left, the last reserve, but it still had its bayonets and sixty men, it was marching in the midst of French chasseurs and was for the time under the orders of a French battalion commander, as its major was more to the left, concerned with an enveloping movement.

The battalion commander said to me: "Go and see what's coming out of this devil of a mill, and stop that hell-fire."

The II/2 started again, bristling with bayonets, tore open its last packet of cartridges and gained the mill, which stopped its horrid grinding, as if by magic.

The Germans began to flee, because, behind the village, the Turcos were making a fierce charge amid a din made up of every noise: whistling of bullets, click of crossing steel, the cries of the Germans in flight from the threats of angry Orientals.

At this moment, we of the II/2 had reached the first house of the village, and our men were firing through the roof at the enemy machine guns which had withdrawn there. Through a shell-hole we got into the next house, when the roof of the first fell in on us. We then got into a third house, where at last we had to cease fire from lack of ammunition and of Germans to shoot. It was 2 a.m. All firing had ceased, but through the holes in the roof under which we were came the noise of hasty running—the last flight of the Germans, our soldiers opined.

Soon Ramscapele was asleep in its ruins; the Turcos were silent; only a few shots, a small matter in a night battle, still screeched from time to time through the air, which was still vibrating from the flight of bullets during the red evening. Under the shelter of a wall the II/2 rested, relying on their bayonets, for they had not a single cartridge left.

At dawn on the 31st the French and Belgian bugles renewed their interrupted blare. At the urgent sound of the charge, the II/2 came out of their resting-place. As the French double past, their commanding officer makes us a little sign with his hand.

<sup>1</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, pp. 153-4; J. Bahou, "Le 6<sup>e</sup> de Ligne à Ramscapele," in *Le XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 27th November 1916.

I understand it: the II/2 can go and breakfast. I see that there are no cartridges left, and, besides, the task is done. . . .

Thus it was that, on the 31st October 1914, while the French with the assistance of other companies of the 6th, 14th, etc., were driving the last Germans out of the village, the II/2 enjoyed their breakfast and renewed supplies at the foot of the great mill of Ramschapelle, whose great dilapidated motionless arms seemed, in the calm of the morning, to be making signs of thanks.

Ramschapelle was ours, and so too was the railway from Nieuport to Dixmude.<sup>1</sup>

At 9 a.m. the 14th Line Regiment reoccupied Ramschapelle halt and the recaptured railway line. The Germans were in full retreat under the protection of their artillery, and were retiring on their positions of the previous day. They left behind at Ramschapelle seven machine guns and over three hundred prisoners.

The final shock had failed, and on the 1st November many signs of a German retreat were visible along the whole Belgian front.<sup>2</sup> The inundation completed their downfall. Slowly, sullenly, and relentlessly the water had flowed into the enemy's trenches, and the district between the Yser and the railway was being gradually transformed into a sea of mud. This, then, was the end—a difficult retreat across a flooded country in the midst of the shells of the Franco-Belgian batteries, firing a defiance. The enemy found himself driven off or trapped in the mud. Many of his soldiers—those of the first lines—being cut off by the water, were forced to come to the Belgian trenches and surrender. They were in mud up to the waist. Long files of prisoners were soon passing along the roads. Others were caught under fire while attempting to escape from the sticky slime, and perished here. Two heavy guns which had been brought to the left bank and a number of machine guns had to be abandoned, as well as many wounded and a considerable quantity of arms and munitions.<sup>3</sup>

In the evening the left bank of the Yser was almost completely vacuated. The Germans only held the last centres of resistance: the village of St.-Georges in front of the Pont de l'Union, Groote-Hemme in front of the Schoorbakke bridge, and Den Torren's and Van de Voude's farms in front of the petrol tanks. As they withdrew, the Germans blew up the Beverdyk bridge, thus cutting the road from Pervyse to Schoorbakke. They also evacuated both the houses at Stuyvekenskerke and the Vicogne château.<sup>4</sup>

Their losses had been terrible. On the position at the railway between Pervyse and Schoorbakke alone, on a front of eight hundred yards, more than three hundred bodies were counted; two hundred were so found in the trenches near Oud-Stuyvekenskerke. Their total losses were estimated at 40,000 men, but we do not know the authority for this.<sup>5</sup> But it is certain that the region of mud and mire which stretched in front of the Belgian positions had engulfed thousands of corpses. From this land of desolation there soon came a sweet, lipid, extremely sickening odour, recalling to all who came near the heavy price paid by senseless ambition to gain its end and the lamentable failure that crowned its sterile efforts.

<sup>1</sup> J. Jacoby, "Un épisode de la prise de Ramschapelle" (31st October 1914), in the *Journal de l'Armée* for 15th December 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158; W. Breton, *op. cit.* p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> The Germans speak of 28,000 dead.

The Kaiser, who was present at the final assault of his troops turned on his heel and left the accursed place. He went to Ypres, soon to meet with another equally bloody reverse.

The battle of the Yser was ended.

The Belgian army had succeeded in barring the coast road to the right wing of the 4th German Army, and had given the Allies the time to make a solid barrier in the place of the cordon across the way to Calais. But at what a cost! The losses in killed, wounded, and missing were, in round figures, 1,500 a day, a total of 18,000. The infantry were reduced to 32,000 bayonets against the 48,000 present when the battle began.<sup>1</sup> The 11th and 12th Line Regiments left in front of Dixmude a quarter of the men and 36 out of 86 officers; the 14th Line Regiment was reduced to 700 men. The 23rd had only 680. Two hundred guns were for the time being out of action.

The Belgians had resisted three complete army corps, each of 35,000 men, reinforced by a reserve division.

Not far from the battlefield of Groeninghe, where their ancestors, the commons of Flanders, had overcome, in 1302, the army of the mightiest king of Christendom, the exhausted remains of King Albert's force had inflicted a heavy reverse on the most powerful military organization in the world.

It is not astonishing, therefore, that on the 18th November 1914 the military correspondent of *Le Temps*, speaking of the Belgian army wrote:—

It bore the first shock of the best troops of Germany, and from the start it was under continual fire without a day of rest. Against it the enemy delivered his heaviest blows, its country was occupied and laid waste, its towns burnt, its battalions decimated. Yet it had no hour of discouragement. Let us salute the Belgian army, which ran with the most illustrious armies of history.

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<sup>1</sup> See *L'Action de l'armée belge*, p. 84, and *La campagne de l'armée belge*, p. 158.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE BATTLE OF THE YSER AND THE EUROPEAN PRESS

SINCE the Battle of the Yser, one may speak of the "glory" of the Belgian army. This glory is the purer, since it was gained in a struggle for the right and in defence of its own country. The Belgian soldiers, those who fell in the sunshine among the cornfields or under the starry sky of the nights of August and September, and those too who fell in the mists of October in the mud of Veurne-Arnabacht, died for an ideal which they understood and believed in, for which they cheerfully gave up their lives. It is a slander upon them to suggest that they fought because they were made to fight, with no other feeling than a bestial thirst for blood during the battle and a spirit of mutiny and scepticism during their hours of rest.

The great organs of the European Press have published their praises, and it will be of interest to reproduce the more significant of these. Whether written in the enthusiasm of the moment or long afterwards in moments of calm reflection, these articles deserve to be presented for the edification of future generations, who will thus see that sacrifice cheerfully offered for the cause of honour and faith roused the highest feelings in the souls of those who witnessed the struggle.

Let us begin with the English Press. The special correspondent of *The Times* in Flanders at the time when the battle was drawing to a close sent to his paper the following appreciation of the valour of the Belgian army :—

In the struggle which has been taking place on the Yser during the last fortnight, it would be impossible to have too great an admiration for the pluck and tenacity of the Belgian army. The battle has more than once proved that the Belgian infantry soldier fights as courageously as any in the world. The perseverance with which the regiments have held their trenches, under the continual fire of an artillery more powerful than their own and against repeated infantry attacks, has been truly heroic.

Shortly afterwards, *The Times* accompanied its reproduction of the short account of the battle published in the *Courrier de l'Armée* by the following comments :—

By this fine defence, which does great honour to all the troops and leaders who took part in it, the Belgians rendered a signal service to the Allied cause.

At a critical moment, when the English further south were fighting for existence, the Belgian army, though decimated, held out practically without help for seven days, and occupied the attention of considerable German forces, inflicting heavy losses upon them. The Belgians lost a quarter of their effectives during the struggle. . . .

We cannot conclude this review without paying a fresh tribute to King Albert, whose continual presence in the midst of his troops and invincible tenacity have done so much to encourage his soldiers. Immediately after him must be mentioned

the name of M. de Broqueville, the Belgian Prime Minister, whose firm attitude in these difficult days has been of inestimable value to his country and to the cause of the Allies.

The same note is struck by the *Daily Telegraph*. This journal says :—

For five days the Belgian army had to bear almost alone the brunt of the battle on the Yser. It has added still more to the reputation that it gained at the beginning of the war by its heroic behaviour in the face of innumerable adversaries.

The debt of gratitude that we owe to our little Ally has immeasurably increased, thanks to the bravery of the remnants of this army during those critical days.

The Belgian army was only brought up to its present strength and its modern organization two years ago, thanks to the perseverance of the King and the Prime Minister, M. de Broqueville.

It is to the work of these two men that France and England owe the favourable situation of the campaign at the present time: the stand before Liège delayed the German invasion of France, the resistance of the army before Antwerp prevented large reinforcements from taking up a position between Von Kluck and the sea, and now the defence of the line of the Yser has brought about the third great German check by stopping, probably for ever, the march on Dunkirk and Calais, which was to have given the German army the base on the Channel that they so much desired.

With its accustomed sobriety and moderation the *Observer* of London remarked :—

Without a doubt it is to the Belgians that we owe the fact that the enemy has not reached Dunkirk. As at Liège and Antwerp, the little army of King Albert has again held up and delayed the Germans in a way which is of inestimable value to the Allies, but on this occasion the Belgians have had the pleasure of assisting the defeat and destruction of their enemies.

The Battle of the Yser was the most complete and severe defeat and the bitterest deception that the Germans have met with of any of the great tactical struggles of the war.

In the *Daily Mail* Mr. G. Ward Price, the war correspondent, says :—

The victory gained by the Belgians after the fortnight of violent combats that filled the second half of October was the most important feat of arms that their army has accomplished, even including the resistance of Liège.

Sufficient homage can never be paid to the Belgian army that, full of courage and devotion, with 60,000 worn-out soldiers inflicted on the enemy losses which amount to 40,000 killed, without counting the wounded.

As to the French Press, we have already mentioned the appreciation by the military correspondent of *Le Temps*, saluting the Belgian army as the equal of the most illustrious armies of history.

The same newspaper later published, under the signature of Pierre Mille, these lines, in which the brilliant Parisian chronicler recalls the Battle of the Yser :—

Yes. The Belgians are sure to hold out! They did so finely in the heroic days of October when they were only a handful! They love to recall with an honest smile this glorious defence which was a victory the results of which were truly equal to the victory of the Marne. They had been told, "It is essential to hold on for forty-eight hours where you are." They endured for a fortnight with the aid of Admiral Ronarc'h's marine fusiliers. When they are asked, "How were you able to do it?" they reply, "By not thinking about the end, the end of ends. The days were short, luckily, and the night soon fell. At four o'clock we used to say to ourselves: 'Ah! now we shall be quiet until seven to-morrow morning.' Next day, the only thought was: 'Come, it will soon be four o'clock.' That was the way." And during that fortnight Belgium was writing one of the finest pages of this war.



In *Le Journal*, M. Paul Erio, a war correspondent who was in Manchuria and the Balkans, expressed himself with a real affection for the Belgian army:—

For seventeen days I was present at this marvellous effort. Living with the men, I saw the fine spirit of sacrifice with which they met their fate. Their courage and intelligence in the battle have yielded unhoped-for results. Dirty and covered with mud, these men fought like madmen, helping one another like the members of a family defending their own. They were unwearied and sublime.

Lastly, M. Stephen Pichon, formerly a Minister, the political editor of *Le Petit Journal*, in rendering homage to the Allies of France, wrote:—

If the Germans have been stopped before the ruins of Ypres, in spite of the furious onrush of their army; if they were unable to continue their march on Calais, in spite of the Kaiser's orders; if they have left more than 200,000 men on the banks of the Yser, in the fields they have laid waste and in the ruined villages which they still bombard out of mere habit, let us remember that we owe all that to our Allies of Belgium and England: we would commit an unpardonable injustice were we to forget it.

After the English and French, the homage of the Russians. The great newspaper the *Novoié Vrémia* published an enthusiastic article under the title of "The Belgian Lions," in which it said:—

The impossible exists even for heroes, and we now know better than before what is the German reserve of strength, without feeling any longer that mysterious fear we had. This feeling has gone for ever, and the first blow was dealt it on the soil of Belgium by the courageous claws of the Belgian lion.

The *Novoié Vrémia* recalls the Battle of the Yser, and ends with the observation:—

Yes, the old legend of William of Orange and his comrades have come to life again in our days.

It is natural that the Swiss newspapers, having regard to the special interest which their country must have in all questions which have any bearing on neutrality and its armed defence, could not remain silent on the efforts of the Belgian troops at the Battle of the Yser. In the course of a study on the Battle of Flanders by M. Georges Batault, published in *La Gazette de Lausanne*,<sup>2</sup> we find the following appreciation:—

The little army of King Albert on the Yser has covered itself with immortal glory. They were asked to hold out for forty-eight hours to give time for reinforcements to arrive. They resisted, with the help only of the heroic brigade of marine fusiliers, for eight days under most desperate conditions. . . . On the 28th October the Battle of the Yser came to an end. It was a bloody reverse for the imperial troops, and cost them the loss of an army corps of the new formations, the flower of the youth of Berlin, saw contingents sent to the massacre in serried masses. . . . The first Battle of Flanders ended to the advantage of the Belgians and French, thanks to the indomitable energy of the troops of King Albert and of the handful of heroes under Admiral Bonarc'h. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Issue for 23rd November 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Issue for 21st November 1915.

In an acute study published by *La Revue Militaire Suisse*<sup>1</sup> under the title "The Operations of the Belgian Army in 1914," Lieut.-Colonel H. Lecomte, of the Swiss engineers, wrote on the subject of the Battle of the Yser:—

(For the Belgian army) to give way further would have been to uncover the Anglo-French left wing, which was making desperate attempts to keep the enemy off Dunkirk and Calais. The best proof of the utility of the Belgian resistance on the Yser is that the French were unable to detach, beside the brigade of marines, more than one division to reinforce the Belgian army during that fortnight of bitter fighting on the front from Dixmude to the sea. If the Belgian army had not held its ground, the Anglo-French left wing would have been left in the air and driven south across the Lys, perhaps even behind the Somme. . . .

Even if it was the inundation that had the last word at the finish, the fact nevertheless remains that without its help the Belgian army held out for eight days, from the 17th to the 25th October, in an improvised position, against extremely violent attacks. The credit for this is due to the energy and skill of the command and to the courage and devotion of the troops. . . .

We may well hope that at a decisive moment our leaders will show as much energy and ability, and our soldiers the same devotion and contempt for death, as the glorious defenders of the Yser.

From the Dutch Press let us take this report in the *Vaderland*<sup>2</sup> of the Hague of a lecture delivered at Leyden by Major Tonnet, of the Dutch artillery:—

Major Tonnet . . . paid homage to the valiant King and to his soldiers for the way in which they succeeded in maintaining themselves on the sea-coast and their junction with the Allies. Belgium and the Belgians, according to the lecturer, deserve, as the fruit of their active and courageous participation in this war, in this struggle which they accepted, rejecting with pride overtures which would have compromised the dignity of the State, that the victory should take its rise from Nieuport.

Last, but not least, let us mention the judgment delivered by the enemy himself upon the Belgian army. We find it in the *Danzers Armees Zeitung*, the most representative military journal of Austria, which, speaking of the Belgians, said:—

We are told that they are mere freebooters, and that, because they would not abandon their neutrality, or because for political reasons they fought on the side of the French and English, they are knaves. One can, however, compel nobody's affections, and it was the good right of the Belgians to fight on one side just as much as on the other. As soldiers we must recognize that the Belgians, notwithstanding the notoriously unmilitary character of the country, have, in the circumstances, fought very well.

The *Kölnische Zeitung* reproduced this article, which also dealt with the Serbians and Russians, and made the comment that it was "a noteworthy judgment."<sup>3</sup>

The Battle of the Yser, therefore, has thrown into relief the heroic efforts of the Belgian army. Since then many foreign journals have been at pains to evolve a sketch of the typical Belgian soldier—the *piotte* or *jasse*, as a complement to the French *poilu* and the English "Tommy."

<sup>1</sup> Issue for December 1915, pp. 489-506.

<sup>2</sup> Issue for 12th May 1915.

<sup>3</sup> According to *The Times* of 20th November 1914, in the article "Through German Eyes."

Here is, in the first place, the English sketch, published in *The Times*<sup>1</sup> under the title "The Belgian Soldier":—

Before it fades I would like to record my impression of the Belgian soldier as I have seen him day after day through the two months ending with the fall of Antwerp.

I have seen him in every kind of duty and off, on the roads, in *cabarets*, in camp and barrack; on the march, in trenches, fighting from behind all sorts of cover or from none; on foot, on horseback, on bicycles, mounted proudly on his auto-mitrailleuse or running behind his gun-team of dogs, each dog pulling and barking as if it would tear the whole German army to pieces. I have seen him wounded on battlefields, by the roadsides, and in hospitals; I have seen him—in the latter days at Antwerp—brought back from the forts and from those terrible advanced trenches unwounded, but, from sheer exhaustion, in almost more serious plight than any of his comrades whom the shells had hit. And I have seen him dead.

As a result there has grown up in me an extraordinary affection for him. Greater even than my admiration of his careless courage is my liking for the man. For all his manhood he has so much of the child in him; he is such a chatterbox, and so full of laughter: and never are his laugh and badinage so quick as when he has the sternest work in hand. Unshaven, mud-bespattered, hungry, so tired that he can barely walk or lift his rifle to his shoulder, he will bear himself with a gallant gaiety which, I think, is quite his own, and is altogether fascinating.

As time goes on, perhaps it will be the faces of the dead and wounded that will live most clearly in my memory, but at present the pictures of the Belgian soldier which stand out sharpest are less lugubrious and more commonplace.

I walked one day back towards Antwerp, along that awful road which runs by Contich and Waerloos to Waelhem. Daily along that road the German shells fell nearer to the city, so that whenever one went out to the place he had visited yesterday, he was likely to find himself disagreeably surprised (I would not have been there had I known it), perhaps a mile inside the range of the enemy's guns. A Red Cross car had dropped me and picked up wounded men instead, and there was nothing for it but to walk back along the road.

Along the road, from the foremost trenches, came a dozen Belgian soldiers, just relieved from what it is difficult to describe otherwise than as Hell. . . . Muddied from head to heel, they could hardly drag their feet along, and, glad of my company, I fell in and walked with the last straggler of the little band, while the shrapnel with its long-drawn scream—whew-ew-ew-ew-bang—broke on either side of us.

At every whew-ew-ew-ew which came too near I dived for cover. If there was no friendly wall or vehicle or tree-trunk at hand, the ditch beside the road was always there. And every time I dived my companion stood in the middle of the road and shook with laughter—not unkindly, but in the utmost friendliness and good humour—waiting till I rejoined him and we renewed our walk.

A little man shockingly bedraggled, worn out almost to the point of collapse, utterly indifferent to his own danger and taking a huge childlike delight in my care for my personal safety—the picture of him as he stood and laughed all alone in the bare road amid the bursting shells seems to me seriously typical of the whole Belgian army.

Another picture also—a composite photograph—I shall never forget. It is the same man—sometimes blonde, sometimes dark, but always the same smallish man—as, on picket duty, he stops you to examine your papers. He does not understand the papers in the least. The British passport begins with the words: "We, Sir Edward Grey, a Baronet of the United Kingdom. . . ." Sternly he wrinkles his brow over the formidable document, earnestly trying to do his duty. At last: "Your name Edward Gra-ee?" he asks. You explain that you wish that it was, and call attention to the place where your own insignificant name is mentioned lower down. To his immense relief he has mastered the central fact, namely, that you are English. And his face lights up with the smile which one has come to know so well: a smile of real pleasure and good will.

Sometimes he speaks a word of English, and with what pride he uses it! "All ri'!" "Good-night!" "How do?" And you go on into the night feeling that you are leaving a friend behind whom you would like to stop and talk to. And he, you know, has been cheered in his lonely duty by the mere contact with an ally.

<sup>1</sup> Issue for 17th October 1914.

Here now is the corresponding French sketch, as it was published in *Le Petit Parisien* of 27th January 1916:—

The "piotte" or "jasse" (that is, the Belgian foot-soldier) has not got the manner of his great brothers, the "poilu" and the "Tommy." A column of English infantry on its way to the trenches is impressive from its long and supple style of marching. The battalions go by like teams of athletes marching to victory at the games. When a French regiment passes, a breath of history seems to stir. The blue-grey of the great-coats and the faces seem to be lit up with a vision of glory.

The "piottes," whatever may be in hand, journey to their fighting positions in the manner of cattle. Their marching is too often reminiscent of that of tired peasants. When they are off duty in rest-camp it is impossible to prevent them wandering about, great-coat and tunic unbuttoned and hands in pockets. When they were equipped in khaki, the first time they were seen to get out of the train when on leave in the French towns in the rear I remember I heard a young woman exclaim, "*Mon Dieu!* How ugly the English have become!"

Certainly the "piotte" is not beautiful: he is a thousand times better than that, he is admirable and touching. He makes up for deficiency in discipline and want of military traditions by his marvellous qualities of bravery and endurance.

His discipline and training are not what they should be and what they would have been if the rulers of his country had not been blinded by naïve confidence in the binding force of treaties.

His traditions? They have been broken by over eighty years of civilian life. He no longer remembers that his forefathers fought gloriously in every field East and West from the Crusades to the Napoleonic wars.

He does not remember, but instinct, that confused recollection of a race, has spoken for him. In the ranks, as in old days, Walloon and Flemish virtues have been fused and a military type has been evolved, endowed with the bite of the Walloon lad and the tenacity of him of Flanders. This type, completely and characteristically Belgian, is the "piotte." He has a language of his own which sounds barbarous and heavy to a Frenchman's ears, but does not lack savour.

"Clopper"—that is, to be afraid—is a thing of which he sometimes speaks, but he rarely experiences. When he does feel it, that does not prevent him doing his duty thoroughly and without fuss.

"Tirer son plan," that he knows; it is the same thing as that which the "poilu" calls "*se débrouiller*" (to get out of the mess). Often left to his own resources during a difficult and dangerous retreat, the "piotte" has learned to take his own initiative rapidly. And to-day in camp or in the trenches he knows how to "tirer son plan" brilliantly.

His unconcernedness is his dominant virtue. Is it, properly speaking, a military virtue? Yes, for it is made up of self-sacrifice and allows great devotion and great sacrifice. No, for it is contrary to discipline. It is the reason why the "piotte" often exposes himself and sometimes risks his life for nothing. During a heavy bombardment, there is nothing more difficult than to keep him in a dugout. As soon as it is over the "piotte" rushes out, spade in hand, towards the shell-holes and searches them for aluminium shell-heads, out of which he fashions rings for his "crotje" [sweetheart] or his godmother.

Who said that the Belgian soldier is low-spirited? Certainly he has his moments of melancholy, when, leaning on the parapet of his trench at the edge of the inundation, he thinks of his parents and of his sweetheart who are waiting for him yonder beyond the great liquid sheet out of which the dead trees of the submerged roads are jutting. But has not the "poilu" himself moments like that?

In truth the "piotte" is gay, but seldom exuberant. He is gay with that gaiety which comes from his knowledge of his courage, with that gaiety which gives courage its finest and most sympathetic shape. His mind has not the lightness of the "poilu." Yet it has spirit—the spirit which comes to every brave man in face of danger.

This "piotte" is, above everything else, capable of devotion, and this is perhaps his finest and best quality from a soldier's point of view. Give the "piotte" a leader, be he corporal, sergeant, or officer, who inspires his confidence and admiration, and he will march with him to the end of the world with a smile, even though he had to clear a road with the bayonet or to have his head broken on the way.



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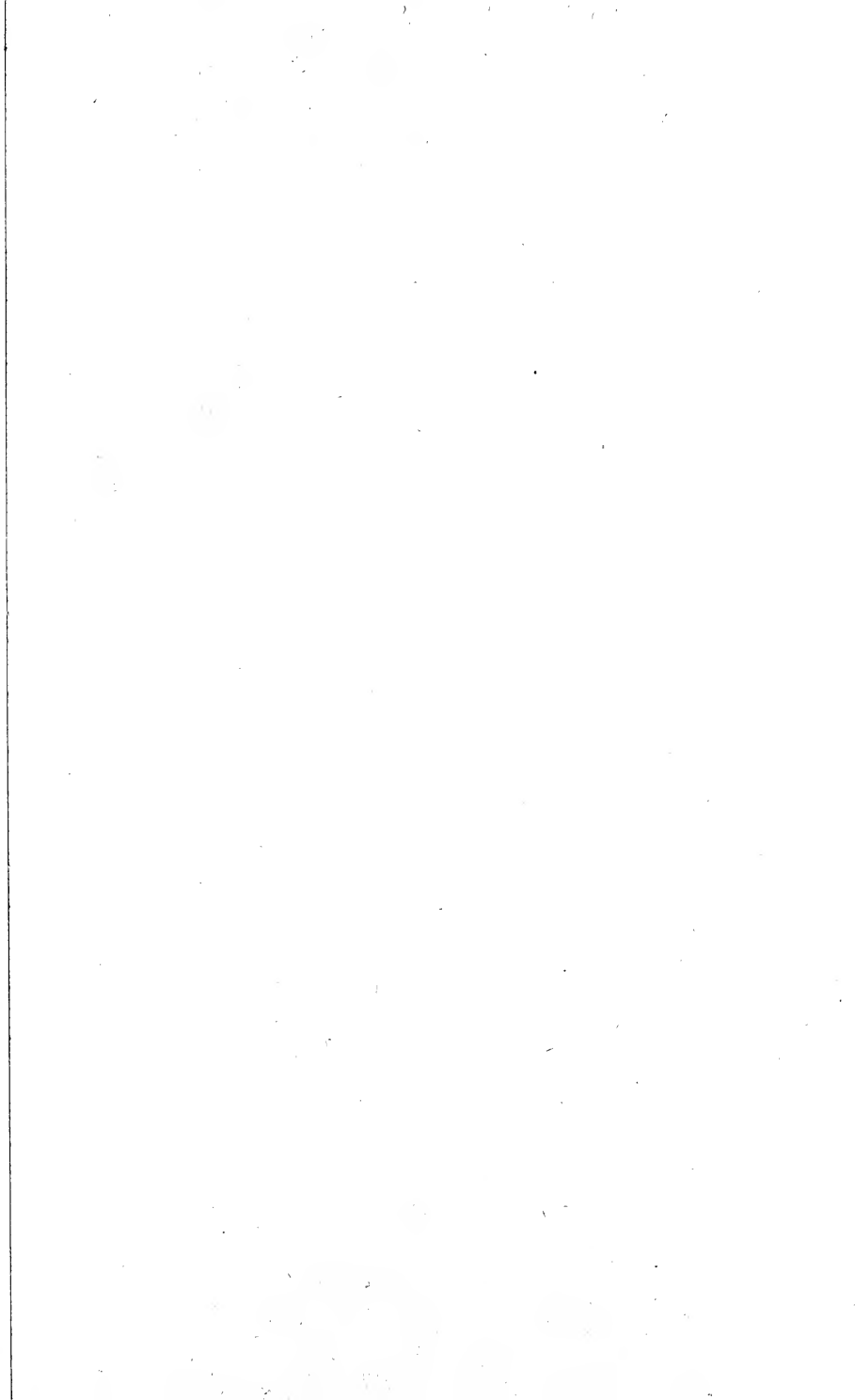
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