

# MY REASON FOR OPTIMISM

By COLONEL F. N. MAUDE, C.B.

IN my opinion the most abiding result of the present war will be to bring out the extraordinary results accruing to the nations from the action of the subconscious instincts of individuals. We are not winning through this tremendous struggle by the action of our conscious minds, but because our subconscious instincts have been stirred into life by the intensity of the emotions aroused by the events which have been happening around us, thanks to which it has been possible to secure immediate action on questions on which it has been hitherto impossible to obtain intellectual agreement. I place in the forefront of all these incidents the action taken by the Government in accepting and passing into law the principle of national insurance against war risks to ocean-borne produce and the ships that carry it. I believe also that this action was the gravest blow to the German plans as yet delivered, for beyond any doubt the weapon on which the enemy counted most to reduce us to impotence and keep us out of the war was that furnished to him by our own custom of free trade in marine insurance, which had grown up without any reference to the changed conditions of naval warfare and the coming of the submarine.

The question had been before the public for the last thirty years, and a variety of workable schemes had been suggested. I published one of them as far back as 1887, and a Royal Commission on Food Supply in War Time was appointed after some twenty years of spade work on the part of many men to deal with the whole problem, but though a recommendation—I think in the minority report—was actually embodied in the proceedings, nothing whatever was done to give effect to its suggestions, which were substantially those which have since become law.

NOW, the bulk of the evidence in this Blue-book was to the effect that the rise of insurance rates was certain to be great in war time, and many thought that it would become prohibitive, so that food prices would go up three and even four-fold in a very few days, particularly if the war opened with a commercial panic and a few sensational losses at sea; and these pages of evidence were as thoroughly studied in Berlin as in our own country, and I have not the least doubt that the German Foreign Office counted on the terror the prospect of

a starving population would create as a sufficient reason for the Government then in power to remain neutral.

The fact that the presence of our Navy on its war stations before the war was actually begun prevented any sensational disasters to our shipping does not invalidate my suggestion, for the decision which placed it in these favourable positions was certainly not due to any action of the Government as a body, and I have selected this particular instance because, knowing much of the internal resistance the proposer of the plan had to face during the last thirty years, I can find no other in which the power of a "collective thought wave" to over-ride all obstacles has ever come under my notice.

BUT the same spontaneous response to other problems has been evident since the opening of hostilities, and great and correct action has been taken in questions of extraordinary intellectual difficulty without hesitation when the crisis arose, not only by members of the Government, but by men in all sorts and conditions of responsibility, down to the humblest citizen or private soldier in the ranks.

It was this sudden collective reversion to implanted hereditary instincts which saved Europe in the crisis of the battle of Mons, and it is asserting itself with every day that passes in the trenches of Flanders. We are not winning this war on drill regulations or by intellectual perception, but simply because, whenever a crisis arises, the inborn instinct of our Anglo-Norse ancestors wakes up within the men, and they fight exactly as those forbears fought before them at Crecy and Agincourt, to mention only two familiar names.

The enemy has equally and oddly reverted to his ancestral habits. He fights obediently as any race of serfs whose emancipation is not yet three generations old naturally would do, and in victory or retreat with all the old Mongolian strain of cruelty and foul licentiousness common to the hordes which very long indeed before Attila swept past the northern edge of the Pripet marshes and drove our Saxon forefathers before them almost to the limits of the North Sea. And in likewise the Russians, who were

still serfs a generation ago, exhibit the characteristics of their original marshland progenitors, viz., marked and uniform individuality characterized by extreme tenacity of purpose, but not stamped by cruelty, because in their origin they were a home-staying race, never driven on by hunger and want to live upon their neighbour's earnings.

Each such race must carry with it the defects of its qualities. Space forbids me elaborating the position of the others, but in our case it follows that under the extreme pressure of present conditions our intellectual faculties are blunted for the time being; we are too taken up by the desire to fight to have time to think. Our governing elements respond to the day-to-day pressure of events and are for the time being unable to look far ahead and prepare for possible emergencies.

I have been somewhat freely accused of being too optimistic for the circumstances, but I can assure my readers that if I were to judge the situation by our intellectual failures during the past twelve months and dwell on the consequences of our sins of omission on this plane, I should easily be counted amongst the very worst pessimists of the occasion, for very few men know better how far more ready for the war we might have been had a little more intellectuality been put into the work of preparation.

BUT for years past I have been studying this problem from the standpoint of national evolution, and as a consequence foresaw very many of the troubles that have come—the want of high-explosive shells and of wirecutters, for example—but the response of the subconscious instinct of the race to every call made upon it has been so much greater than I ever dared to hope that our deficiencies, well though I know them, weigh only a trifle in the scales, and I am more than ever confident of the latent power within the breed to overcome even the worst that can now threaten us, and until I hear on good authority of British officers and men failing to meet emergencies in the field no pessimistic prognostication will move me from the attitude of optimism that I have consistently upheld. It is no new conviction with me. Those who have read my "War and the World's Life," written now some thirteen years ago, will see that I held it even then almost as wholeheartedly as now.

## THE GREAT RUSSIAN RETREAT

By A MILITARY CORRESPONDENT

Kovel, and with the exception of Grodno and the secondary fortress of Olita, crush the entire main

NEVER since the war began has Russia occupied so much public attention as now. The great retrograde movement is still magnificently under way. The Grand Duke is still withdrawing his forces. Poland is now in German hands. The next move may be an invasion of Russia with objective Petrograd. According to some hopeful experts, August, 1915, resembles August, 1914, when the march on Paris was turned into the rout at the Battle of the Marne. Will the possible march on Petrograd be turned into a similar recoil? If so, from which direction will it come? Russia cannot now come back to her offensive form. Will the big drive on the Western front by Britain and France turn the tide?

The world of experts is waiting for an answer. Meanwhile the movements and the conditions of the Russian armies are of immediate interest, and are well outlined in the following extracts from two cable despatches from London to the New York Herald:

BREST-LITOVSK, the greatest fortress and entrenched camp in Russia, and regarded by military authorities as a vastly more important strategic point than Warsaw, has been occupied by the Austro-German armies. The exact time of its evacuation by the Russians cannot be stated, but apparently it began soon after the piercing of the western and northwestern front of the position by the Germanic allies on Tuesday night. As was the case at Warsaw, Ivangorod and Ossawetz, the Russian garrison not only escaped with minor losses, but managed to carry with them or destroy all their supplies and ammunition.

No attempt was made by Grand Duke Nicholas to defend the fortress itself. The Russian commander-in-chief, as shown all through the great campaign, regards a fortress as important only so long as it serves the purposes of a field army. In other words, it is used to facilitate the movements of the mobile force, not to imprison and immobilize it. Acting on this theory, he has not hesitated to sacrifice these fortifications of steel and concrete if by doing so he can save his armies, and the Russian people, having been brought to understand this, are accepting the bulletins of evacuation with the utmost equanimity.

The three weeks since August 5, the day of the German entry into Warsaw, have seen the Germanic allies march and fight over 120 miles of Polish plain, between the Vistula and the Bug, seize the fortresses of Novo Georgievsk, Kovno, Ossawetz, Bialystok and

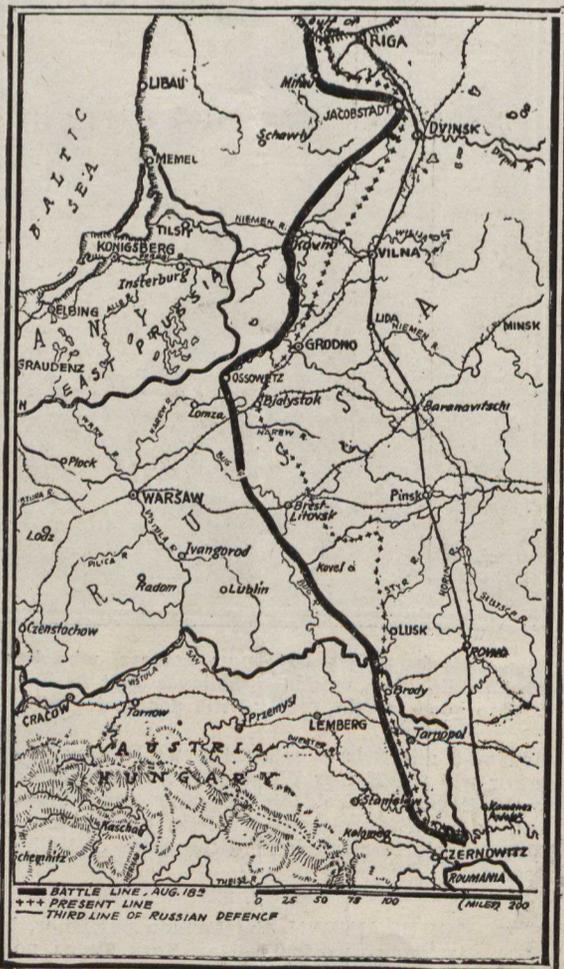
Russian line of defence, the Bug River-Brest-Litovsk barrier.

Military writers here give full credit to the great war machine that could accomplish this enormous task in so brief a time. But they give as much credit to Grand Duke Nicholas, whose genius in retreat has extricated his forces from traps into which less ably led armies would have fallen in disaster. Not once has the German net, skilfully placed and as skilfully manoeuvred, caught the Russians in its meshes. Great numbers of prisoners have been captured by the Germanic allies, but these Russian losses are regarded as a necessary part of a great retirement in which virtually every engagement is fought by rear guards. The main army always has been able to get away free.

Twice, at least, the Tsar's forces have faced a supreme crisis when their destruction would not have been surprising, but both times the line has stiffened and held while the Germanic leaders raged and sent their men into furious but impotent assaults.

In the opinion of observers here the most serious aspect of the situation for the Russians now is the Austro-German wedge driven into the Pripet marshes from Kovel. This wedge has effectually cut off the army south of Kovel, and operating along the Zlota Lipa River to the Dnieper, from all connection with the great body on the line from Brest-Litovsk to the Gulf of Riga. The only railway communication now between the extreme left wing reaching down to Bessarabia and the Roumanian frontier and the centre and right is by a circuitous route through Kovno and Lunienz, a distance of more than three hundred miles over a single track railroad. It is the first definite break the Teutonic allies have been able to inflict in the Russian alignments in the more than a year of war. This break is not regarded as especially serious at this juncture, however, and only can become serious, it is believed, if the opposing forces begin active development operations against the isolated left wing. Such an operation must necessarily come from the north, since the extreme left of the line now rests in close proximity to a neutral frontier.

THE retirement of the Russians from Brest-Litovsk is directed now toward Plinsk, on the eastern edge of the Pripet marshes, and one hundred miles away. They retain control of the only railways traversing the swamps, a line direct to Plinsk, and the main road to Moscow. These roads, one be-



The line of Russian defence swinging east towards Dvinsk, Vilna and Rovno.