

HOW THE WAR LOOKS NOW

Our War Expert Sums Up the Factors of Interest on All Fronts

THE Allies have all their cards on the table. Germany has not. Germany's bluff is that the Allies intend to dismember the German Empire. By their note to President Wilson the Allies clearly show that they intend to do no such thing. It is time the Central Powers came down to facts. A concise statement of what they want might clear the air. The submarine menace is still one of the big factors. No doubt Germany means business here—her last great arm of offensive. Arming of all merchant ships is the only defence. Meanwhile on which front are the Allies to force a decision? Easterners argue that Germany must be defeated on the front where she aims to

extend her sphere of influence, which is the East. Meeting of allied commanders at Rome and recent allied activities in the West indicate that the big decision may be looked for in France, where men and munitions are easily available. The new defensive policy of Germany in the West, argues the Easterner, makes it necessary to match Germany where she intends to maintain her big offensives—in the East. At the same time the allied army at Saloniki is quiescent. Why? It is too big for mere aggressions against Greece; too small to match the Teuton forces. Something needs doing here. The average reader will find this neutral summary of the war situation instructive.

GERMANY has not yet made a reply to the Allied note, but, as was said last week, she will certainly do so. The German

bulletins that speak so gloomily of the closing of the peace door none the less indicate in the same breath that the door is not so completely closed as to exclude all glimmer of light. Germany, we are told, will not remain silent, and while there are no official indications of her action, we are allowed to believe that it will take the form of a proclamation to the world from the rulers of the four Teutonic powers. And that proclamation will not be essentially defiant, however defiant may be its phraseology. It will be an implied invitation to a rejoinder. Between the lines it will be a continuation of the notes that preceded it. It will be a further invitation to end the war.

For Germany can not allow matters to stand where they are. The word is with her, and an expectant world is awaiting it. First she asks for a peace conference without a preliminary statement of terms, as, of course, she had a right to do. The invitation is declined on the main ground that it carries with it the admission of Allied defeat. Then we have the intervention of the President, an intervention that happens to coincide in time with the German note, but that is not, so we are assured, a result of that note. The President asks the belligerents to define the ends for which they are fighting, in the hope that among them it may be possible to find some basis for a mutual approach. The Allies respond to that request in a manner unexpectedly ample, but Germany makes no reply that is at all along the lines asked of her. In other words, the Allies lay their cards upon the table, but Germany holds hers in her hand. Once more it may be said that she is entirely within her right in doing so, and in withholding the information asked of her in a friendly spirit by the American Government. None the less she has placed herself in a position of diplomatic disadvantage. The Allies have avowed to the world the objects for which they are fighting, and among them there is nothing that can be construed into an intention to crush Germany or to dismember the German Empire. Germany, on her part, refrains from an avowal of her own specific aims, but asserts her intention to continue the war in order to prevent herself from being crushed and dismembered. Obviously it is a position that can not be sustained. Germany can not continue without loss of credit to assert that she is in danger of destruction by her enemies after those enemies have called the whole world to witness a programme in which the destruction of Germany finds no place. The publication of such a programme, even though we may think that the programme itself is extravagant, has none the less a definite limiting force. In no event could it be seriously enlarged. Germany is therefore compelled to make some corresponding avowal of her aims. She can not continue to assert that she is fighting to prevent the Allies from doing something which they have no intention to do, and that they have called humanity to witness that they have no intention to do.

There seems to be no reason why Germany should not now avow the broad lines of her war policy, and I believe that she will speedily feel herself impelled to do so. If she should continue to hide them she will lay herself under the imputation of harbouring intentions that would meet the condemnation of the neutral world. She might say, for example, and I

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think that it would be nearly the truth, that the chief resolution now remaining to her is to dominate the transcontinental railroad and the course of the Danube, and that to this end she intends to control Serbia and Roumania and to advance the territorial interests of Turkey and Bulgaria. She might further indicate her willingness to evacuate Belgium and France in furtherance of the much more real advantages just indicated. Such a statement upon her part would go a long way to clear the atmosphere, and even though it were instantly negated by the Allies—as of course it would be—it would none the less go a long way to placate neutral sentiment, which is very much concerned with Belgium and France, but which is lukewarm with regard to the Balkans. Germany might even offer to compensate Belgium without any loss of dignity on her part, seeing that the Chancellor specifically promised to do this at the time Belgium was invaded. If Germany were to avow even so limited a programme as this it would at least place her upon a diplomatic parity with her enemies. But if she does not do something of this kind it will lead inevitably to the inference that she is hiding her intentions because they would be distasteful to the neutral world.

THE greatest of all problems that the Allies must now face—that is to say until the weather shall permit the resumption of land fighting—is the submarine problem. We need not have any doubt that Germany is now well supplied with submarines. They are easily and rapidly built, and they demand nothing in the way of construction materials that is actually out of Germany's reach. There is a general expectation in Europe that Germany is about to send forth her submarine fleet with a wide instruction to prevent anything that floats from reaching the British Isles, and that she expects in that way to produce the same food and munition shortage that she herself is unquestionably suffering from. To comment upon the situation is particularly difficult in view of the mystery that has always enveloped this particular feature of the war. Great Britain, for obvious reasons, has always concealed the measure of her success against the submarines. But that the underwater craft is by no means omnipotent is shown by the fact that communication between England and France has never been broken and that no one of the army of transports perpetually passing to and fro has yet been sunk. On the other hand it is comparatively easy to defend, by nets and otherwise, so narrow a neck of water as that separating the two countries.

BUT Great Britain will certainly defend herself against a new and extended submarine peril by arming all merchant ships. With six small quick-firing guns and competent gunners a merchant ship should be fully a match for a submarine. And if merchant ships, thus armed, were to sail in couples it would be very difficult for a submarine to assail either. A submarine with her periscope submerged is blind and helpless. Until her periscope is exposed she does not know if she is alone on the ocean or if she is not already covered by a gun at a range of a hundred yards. She must expose her decks for at least many seconds before she can get

ready to use her own guns, and she could not aim a torpedo without careful manoeuvring for position. A merchant ship, on the other hand, can open

fire before the submarine has become fully aware of her presence if she is fortunate enough to see her periscope. She can open fire on an admirable target long before the submarine is ready to use her guns. And even if the submarine should succeed in striking her victim she would be in great danger if there should be a consort. This is not to say that a great many merchantmen would not be destroyed, but it would none the less be a mistake to suppose that these ships would fall a helpless prey to their assailants. On the contrary, and considering their superior numbers, the odds would be somewhat against the submarine.

The recent meeting at Rome of the Allied commanders was presumably for the purpose of arranging the main lines of attack for the coming spring, and we may suppose that the choice of Rome for such a conclave is indicative of the part to be played by the Italian army. In the meantime the discussion between the Easterners and the Westerners continues, sometimes without due recognition of the fact that the military plans of the Germans may prove to be the determining factor. The case for the West is comparatively a simple one, and it is based mainly upon facility and convenience. Troops and munitions can be transported to the Somme in a few hours. The material mechanism of war has here been developed to its highest point. Steamship and railroad lines have reduced the difficulties to their minimum. A friendly country has lubricated the wheels of war, and removed a vast burden of toil that might otherwise prove nearly unbearable. Everything points, says the Westerner, to the wisdom of seeking a decision in the West, where it can be more easily obtained than in any other part of the continental field.

TO this the Easterner replies with arguments that are at least as cogent, although he must necessarily admit that his plan implies vastly greater difficulties. An Allied victory in the West, he says, will not be decisive unless it should approach the dimensions of a German catastrophe. Germany knows already that no permanent territorial or other advantages can accrue to her in the West, and for this reason she is ready to retire her lines as soon as the cost of holding them shall become greater than she is prepared to pay. This is the plan that she actually, and avowedly, followed during the Somme offensive of last year, a plan that involved the "feeding back" to the French and British of all ground for which they were willing to make the necessary sacrifices. We are now told, and with some probability, that General von Emmich, the conqueror of Liege, has elaborated a plan, and secured its adoption, by which the German lines in the West shall stand wholly on the defensive in order that the Eastern campaign may be sustained with every available man and gun. Of what value, asks the Easterner, to win battles in the West that will have no definite effect upon Germany's territorial schemes, which are wholly in the East? Those schemes would be unaffected even though the German lines should retire to the Meuse or even to the Rhine. Germany could still claim to be the "man in possession" of the transcontinental line in the Balkans and of the Danube. Her hold on all that she now dreams of holding would be still unshaken.