



A sample of what British big guns did to German trenches in the big advance a few weeks ago. Official photograph by permission of the Board of Censors B. E. F., taken by Central News.

SEEN FROM THE TOP

Tragedy of Three French Towns Glimpsed by a Canadian from a Captive Balloon

By BRITTON B. COOKE

Northern France, Behind the British Lines,
September 30th.

YESTERDAY, with many misgivings—for of all things there is nothing so treacherous as the invertible part of the alimentary canal—I went up in a captive balloon and with a pair of sixteen-diameter French binoculars looked out over the face of Flanders. A captive balloon is nothing. For a casual visitor there is not even any considerable danger in it. But from this altitude one can overlook much of Flanders, an arena in which Empires have again locked horns, and one gains strange impressions, the only things the Censor over here allows to be exported. From the front line trenches, where we were three days ago, the captive balloon seems very remote from the danger zone. Like a sausage which has been crumpled in at its upper end, it hangs in the haze of Indian summer just over a certain hill in the rear of the Canadians. It seems to be out of sight of the enemy. But as a matter of fact, from the balloon the Canadian Front Line trenches seem to be at one's very feet, and one is tempted to think that by a little stretching of the neck one might be able to peer right down on top of the Germans in their trenches on the far side of the valley.

"Look," said the official observer, "can you make out those tall objects over there to the right?"

"Masts?"

"No. Smoke stacks."

"What do they represent?"

"That is Lille."

They were indeed smoke-stacks, but no smoke came from the tops.

"Now can you see just beyond Lille two other groups of chimneys, side by side?"

"Yes," said the observer. "What are they?"

"One is Tourcoing. The other is Roubaix."

"Yes."

"Do you want the story of those cities?"

"Is there a story?"

"Is there? I know it, because before this war I was interested in the silk and dye business. I ought to know."

So up there, pointing out over the warm September landscape of France, with the heat rising in zig-zags and an occasional aeroplane buzzing overhead like a saw snoring relentlessly through the heart of a British Columbia fir, I learned the tragedy of Lille, Tourcoing and Roubaix. It might be, for all appearances, the tragedy of Galt, Preston and Hespeler, or Vancouver, Victoria and New Westminster, or Truro, Halifax and St. John.

EVERYONE knows that the Germans tried to monopolize and did to a large extent monopolize the dye trade of the world. Everyone does not know that France had her eye on the ad-

vantages and disadvantages of that situation long before American trade journals dreamed of writing special articles on dyes, or Japan subsidized her dye-makers. Certain French merchants and manufacturers determined that if they could not produce the actual dyes in France that at least they would produce the most beautiful dyed fabrics. Germany might sell the colours. France would make it possible for beautiful women to wear those colours in exquisite fabrics. One thing alone menaced the plan of the French manufacturer. It was the cheapness of German labour.

In Belgium, labour used to be cheap. To get Belgian labour and keep French factory conditions and French tariff advantages, the manufacturers one by one built factories in Lille, Tourcoing and Roubaix, which are pleasant cities, well-equipped with transportation facilities, not too heavily taxed for municipal affairs and close to the Belgian border. Belgian labour was enlisted; came to work every morning at a very early hour, and late in the day trudged home over the boundary to their less expensive Belgium. Thus the gorgeous fabrics of these three cities—and other border cities, such as Hulluch and Comines, began some fifteen years ago to issue into the goods warehouses of the world. Railway traffic from these cities increased enormously. Buyers from the new world no longer spent only a glorious holiday in Paris, but had to come down to these border cities. The Germans, unable to compete, were forced into the position of supplying a raw material for the French fabric-makers. Lille, in five years, sprouted real millionaires in her fashionable residential section. Rich men brought motor launches to the Canal De La Haute Deule—which, you can see on any war map which, if you follow it, will take you clear to La Bassée and Bethune—and the equipages which took the children for the air in the forest beyond Emmerin rivalled those of Paris. Lille, Tourcoing and Roubaix grew fat and powerful and the Germans who had hoped through their mastery of colours to become masters also of the fine-fabric trade of the world were discontent.

WHEN the Germans captured these cities they treated them with elaborate care. That much is known from the refugees. Even in days of peace the owners of the mills guarded their machinery jealously against the inspection of outsiders. There were countless secrets that accounted for the particular qualities of various goods. When the cities were abandoned many of the special parts of the machines were removed. Some machines were destroyed by their owners. But others had to be left intact. A few of these in German hands are said already to have given away some of the secrets of the manufacturers. German experts were imported on the day following the military occupa-

tion of these cities, in order that the details of the machinery might be studied.

"M'sieu! M'sieu!" wailed a little French manufacturer—one of those from Lille—in the course of a conversation with the officer from whom I obtained this story. "Our poor Lille, *Notre pauvre Lille*—she will never be any more! For why? They have already taken away our machinery. They have stolen many of our secrets—though not the most important ones, praise Heaven! But will they ever see Lille fall back into our hands whole?"

Little by little the Hun is being forced back out of France. An inner wall of defence he may have, but it does not contain these cities. He must abandon them. Yet to take them we must bombard them and even before that—"Ah, M'sieu," concluded the little manufacturer, "the Germans will blow up our cities. The cellars, where we used to keep simple things like dyes and old parts of machinery—these are now full of the abominations of war! The day the Germans are driven from these cities, that day will they fire the fuse. You have seen Ypres, M'sieu? Desole? A ruin? That will be our lovely Lille, our Tourcoing and Roubaix."

YOU know the Hamilton Mountain and the road which runs along the top for no other purpose, you might think, than to let people see how beautiful Hamilton is from above. Or you recall the heights above the Caledon Club, where the road struggles breathlessly up toward Orangeville? Or, better still, you know the highest hill up behind Doon, where you can see Preston and Galt and Hespeler all together in the exquisite Ontario landscape? Then you can tell something of what it is like to be swaying high up in the air over France and looking at the things the Germans have done—and may do. The landscape is much the same as that of middle Ontario, except that the trees are naked from the ground to a point very near the top, so that when the afternoon haze rises obscuring the trunks of the trees, the tops appear to float like little hand-made clouds over roads, fields and farm-houses. There may here be more roads, and instead of going primly east and west and north and south they twist every-which-way and seem to tread on one another.

Imagine, then, that you once lived in Galt and were prospering there in a trade. Suppose that your family had lived in Galt for a long time and you had been born, taught to speak, schooled, whipped, ensnared by beauty, accepted, married, given children and grown bald in Galt—could you look on it from the hill at Doon and see it in the hands of a blood-stained enemy and not be moved?

This is one of the tragedies of France.

Only a miracle can save this French Galt-Preston-Hespeler group from destruction; that would be the ending of the war before the Germans are driven out.

Brown Bobs Up Again

BOMBARDIER BROWN bobs up again. For many weeks this genial correspondent from anywhere en route and from as near the front as possible has been dead to the world of newspaper publication. His several letters published in the Courier since last winter have been some of



the most casual things ever got together, written under conditions that would paralyze a conventional correspondent. How Brown wrote these letters he himself describes in his latest communique, dated from Port of Embarkation. These were written, as he says, "in sickness, in health, in light and in darkness, when I had a little leisure and when I had to steal it or bribe some one to get it—paying for rooms in which I have to write," etc., etc.

Many weeks ago we wrote Brown asking

him for a photograph. He says in the communique:

"I enclose my photograph—a poor one—and will try to get another soon. It was taken in a Tommy Atkins place at Aldershot, here they take about three seconds, and devil take the lights and shadows."

Brown's difficulties in all such matters he off-handedly explains:

"My latest task, assigned me by the Colonel, has been messing the whole column—550 men. This was because I made a success of messing my own section, which I took over as soon as we arrived at Camberley. To reorganize the messing system, cut out 'graft' and wastage, train the cooks and orderlies into systematic habits and inoculate the 'square deal' into all took all the energy and ability I possess, and kept me going night and day.

"This will explain why I have not finished my last two letters. Well, I shall surely finish them as soon as I land in France."