



Vol. XVIII.

November 20th, 1915

No. 25

# THE DEVIL'S BACK DOOR

*Which it Will be the Allies' Winter Programme to Shut in His Majesty's Face*

By JAMES JOHNSTON

EVERY new battle front lets loose a fresh lot of opinionators. Those of us who win wars with typewriters are entitled to a new outfit of ideas as to what Germany really means by this spectacular drive into Balkania. That is worth finding out. Almost any man's opinions are more or less interesting. The mere fact that Kitchener has gone down into that part of the world looks to some people as though England realizes this to be the most dangerous frontier of the whole war. Cut loose from the War Office, back again in the near-Orient, where he has always been a kind of military wizard as fabulous as Napoleon, Kitchener begins to look to some of his admirers now like a warrior with a new lease of life and a new mission in the Empire.



SIR BRYAN MAHON,  
Major-General of British troops in Serbia.

Well, be that as it may, we shall probably wait a good while before we hear of even Kitchener working any Balkania and Constantinople are not Omdurman. And for all we know K. of K. may not act the part of generalissimo at all. He may not even see Sir Bryan Mahon commanding British troops in Serbia, or Gen. Munro and Gen. Birdwood in charge of our men on Gallipoli. But the fact that he is "somewhere in the near East" means a great deal just now to the imagination, which has come to be one of the assets of those who stay at home and win the war by arguing about it.

Suppose we imagine—that Germany is now making her last great offensive? This is Bellocian, of course. But a little Belloc sometimes goes a long way in a world war. Let us remember that Germany's front is a crooked-sided triangle. One long side is the North Sea and the Channel and the French frontier—hopelessly blockaded. Another by the Baltic and the Russian frontier—and here Germany has gone so far that she can go no further, at a cost of nearly a million men. A conservative estimate puts German losses on all fronts during the past six months as 300,000 a month. Most of this represents the spectacular sweep across Poland and Galicia.

With those two long sides of the triangle blocked to Germany, the little third side was still to be tried. That is Balkania, Constantinople and all that lies beyond in Egypt, Asia Minor and as far beyond that as the German war-machine is able to exert any violence.

WE all know now by what desperate means Germany clubbed the sordid and pro-German Bulgaria into her camp. We know how desperately she has tried to get Greece to follow suit, and Roumania at least to remain neutral; just as she worked for ten months to keep Italy from going to war against Austria. Balkania was a fine field for German so-called diplomacy and brute force. Serbia was the front door of Balkania, with Bulgaria just beyond. Serbia must be steam-rollered. Nothing so very new about that in itself. It was Serbia that started the war, and it was only because Austria was too busy elsewhere that she did not long ago do her best to crush Serbia. But Serbia is only part of the Balkan game; and the Balkan game is part of the greater game of bursting through that third side of the triangle—for what purpose?

Some say to relieve the Turks and keep the Allies from getting Constantinople. That so far as it goes may be all right. But Constantinople is not the probable end of German desperation in that part of the world. Beyond Constantinople lies the British Empire, beginning on the south shore of the Mediterranean. And Germany has long ago had one consuming desire—to do England, and England alone, as much damage as possible before the last great German offensive has spent itself. There would be no use in Germany stopping war until she had hurt England somewhere. Her submarine campaign did England about the same kind of damage as a flock of gnats to a bull. The gnats are just about quiet now. The two naval bombardments killed a few non-combatants and no more will be attempted. A naval invasion of England is not even a German dream now. The break-through to Calais for the emplacement of siege guns to dominate the Channel is an exploded miscalculation. The Zeppelin raids have damaged several areas in London, mainly by fires, and killed a few hundred people. But the winter fogs will keep the Zepps away from England for several months now, and by spring Sir Percy Scott should be able to make London as well fortified against aerial attacks as Paris has been since the war began. In the short nights of summer in that latitude there is small chance of Zepps doing anything. Germany may expect her Zepp campaign to be ultimately as bootless as her submarine menace. The submarine blockade was intended to starve England. The blockade of German ports by the British navy is beginning the long process of under-feeding if not starving Germany.

So, it seems to Germany as though England is most vulnerable now at the point where she has the smallest armies, the furthest from her base of all supplies. That is in the Aegean, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. To get armies down there means a six-day voyage from England. Armies once there can't be easily ferried back again. Germany can get armies into that region much more easily, through Serbia and Bulgaria, even though to do so takes the German advance guard, even as near as Constantinople, one and a half times as far from Berlin as Berlin is from the furthest east point occupied by German armies in Poland.

While the Teutons, with the aid of Bulgaria from the south, are acting on Serbia like the proverbial military nutcracker, they are at the same time getting possession of a country rich in many

kinds of minerals and other resources. Germany has already commandeered and plundered the Serbian harvest. The map on this page gives some idea of the kind and extent of these war resources. This is a kind of war game already practised in Belgium, France and Poland, in all of which countries Germany has got her hands upon valuable mineral properties of vast extent. So far as raw material of war is concerned this means something to Germany. It does not help the cotton situation, which is supposed to be in a state of blockade from American and Egyptian supplies. But Germany says she hopes to get cotton through from Anatolia on the borders of Persia.

SO far Germany seems to be winning her kind of game in that quarter, just as up to a certain point she won in Belgium, in France, in Poland and Galicia. But it must be borne in mind that in all these countries she ceased to win before she had accomplished her purpose. What she is trying to do in the trans-Balkania quarter is, so far as we can see, even more quixotic than what she has tried to do on any other front. She is trying to bedevil England overseas. The further she plunges down into that part of the world the further she gets from



SHADED AREA OF SERBIA HELD BY GERMANY AND HER ALLIES. (—) FRENCH RAILROADS (---) UNCOMPLETED RAILROADS

Showing how far Germany, Austria and Bulgaria have succeeded in occupying Serbia and the resources in raw material which they have obtained. The Allies are working between Salonica and Strumnitza.