

PARIS THEN AND NOW

If There is to be a Second Siege, Remember 1870

WE must never forget that Paris was once taken by the Germans—and how it was done. If there is to be a siege in 1914, it must be enacted on the same general principles as the siege that began on September 19th, 1870. Between the first battle at Saarbruck and the investment of Paris in 1870 was seven months. In that time 1,100,000 Germans gobbled up 575,000 of a half-trained army of French—at Saarbruck, Spicheren, Woerth, Gravelotte, St. Privat, Peaumont, Sedan, Strassburg and Metz. Or rather it took as prisoners by the fall of Metz, Strassburg and other engagements 200,000 French, besides those killed in battle. It reduced the effective army of the French to a force not much bigger than the first British expeditionary force to France in 1914.

Why? Because to begin with the French army was not a real mobilization, but merely a muster. The French had no machine. The Germans had. Conscription in France was a sort of noblesse oblige based upon politeness and patriotism. All that the German machine was, the French army was not. The French were inspired by traditions and the name of Napoleon held by their Emperor the Third. They conceived it absurd that Prussia should claim to be a real military power. What memories had a Prussian? Bah! He had never been a spectacle. Never had Berlin been a contemplated capital of Europe. Paris had. For seven years Paris had the four bronze horses with the chariot of Victory seized by Napoleon from the gate of the Brandenburg Thor in Berlin. The quadriga is now back at the western end of the Unter der Linden.

Since it was absurd for Germany to rank as a military power, it was superfluous for the French to create a war machine. War was not necessarily either hell or a machine. It was—magnificent. Napoleon had made it so. Vive l'Empereur! So while Prussia silently organized its machine down among the farmhouses of the back Strasses, France despised mobilization and trusted in God. France was not prepared for war, because France at that time did not know what modern war really was.

The French army was in one grand fluster of concentration. The army units were not localized. There was no chain of responsibility. Everything was concentrated at headquarters, where they had in stock as much confusion as anything else. When a reservist hurried back to the colours he was sent to a distant depot company to get his equipment. He was then hurried back to his regiment, which, of course, was close round his own village. What is called the higher tactical units had no effective peace organization. An army corps in time of war suddenly found itself a mass of inexperienced officers and men about a trained nucleus held together in times of peace. The staff and troops had never worked together. They just muddled through. As long as the tricolour was at the head and the band ready to play, what difference? Store depots were large and very few. Rifles and ammunition and clothing and boots and all the paraphernalia that makes the difference between a civilian and a soldier were massed at centres that could only be reached with much time and trouble. Petty details that should have been left to the military centre officers had to be referred to the War Office at Paris. The whole organization such as it had become was not only headquartered at the War Office, but it was worked out there in detail with a maximum of confusion and a minimum of efficiency. The standing army reinforced by a sudden jumble of civilians was mobbed rather than mobilized to the frontier when if each man had rifle and haversack and boots he was lucky—and certainly he did not know where he belonged, what he was expected to do, who were his real commanders, and where his unit stood.

SO France went out to meet the Germans as a more or less inspired mob. The mob was only half the size of the German machine; and it was not half so efficient. The French army had fine officers and brave men and a great cause. But the generals were at loggerheads from the start and they were worse when the war got under way. The nation itself was divided into a Napoleonic and anti-

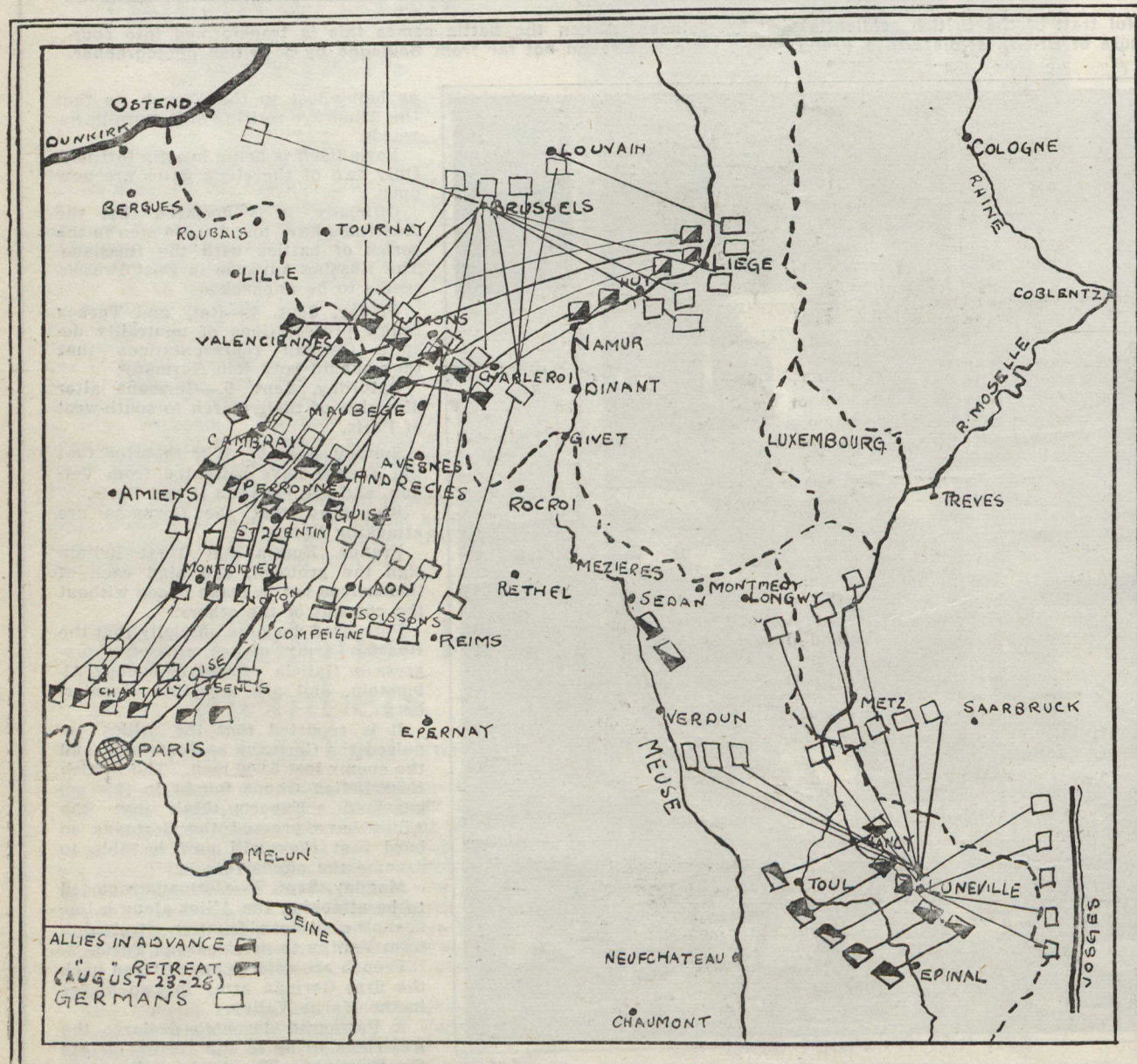
Napoleonic faction, and it was hoped that the war would bury the hatchets. But before the war was over there was a revolution in France and a complete change of administration. There was no unanimity except of desire. There was no machinery. The army was broken up into small divisions operating at random against a force of three armies working in perfect harmony. The Germans massed their units where they did the most good. The French distributed theirs where they kept out of as much harm as possible. There was no lack of bravery or of spirit. The French had more of it than their foes. There was a sad lack of efficiency, equipment and discipline. The German officers were a democracy based on efficiency. The French were an aristocracy based upon rank. The French had the better rifle; the Germans the better use of what they had. In artillery the Germans had the breech-loader. The French muddled along with the slow muzzle plugger which couldn't be loaded again till the smoke had cleared away from the snout. The French cavalry were used in divisional squadrons for magnificent charging performances. The Germans used their cavalry as screens and scouting forces just as they are doing now. The Germans knew precisely what they were expected to do with their machine in a programme. The French flung their forces here and there according to the mood of the commander or the impulse of the moment.

In brief, the French army only found itself—when it found itself beaten and its soldiers cooped up in Metz and Strassburg. They were thrown into a state of defense when they had been the original attack; and they used the forts for protection instead of for attack. The Germans acted on the offensive. They have done so in this war. There is nothing new to the German. In the war of 1870 everything but traditions was new to the French.

In seven months the French army was cut down to a remnant which, when Paris was besieged, set to work to organize a fresh force of 750,000 by conscript levies under a change of government. All the while the Germans were holding back the main part of the French army they were concentrating their own remnant in the field upon Paris. They were repairing the railways and the tunnels blown up by the French. They were keeping open their lines, and when Paris was girdled about by a ring of Germans one man to a pace, with 622 field guns and the outer forts abandoned because they were incomplete, the German lines of communications were pushing back their arteries into the Fatherland for supplies, using the French railways to within eight miles of Paris to bring them up. Meanwhile, after the siege had begun, the Germans forced the capitulation of Strassburg. That released a large force of Germans and opened a fresh railway line to Paris. Metz surrendered. More Germans were released. The German army was adequately fed outside, while the French citizens were starving within. Hunger became an ally of the field gun. Paris, in spite of its army of levies harassing the Germans from the rear, was doomed to fall. And the fall of Paris, owing to the French concentration, meant the fall of France.

WHAT was true in 1870 is true of the Germans wedging their way to Paris now, and in a much bigger way. What was true of the French army at the Siege of Paris is not true of the French army in 1914. The French people are solidly united as never before. The army knows—what to expect—from experience. The fortifications of Paris are much stronger, more numerous and occupy a much greater area than they did in 1870. It will take a huge army to invest Paris. The Germans are employing the same tactics in investiture that they used in 1870; three armies converging from as many angles to automatically form a ring about the city with tremendous siege guns well forward in the line of march for the battering ram against the superb artillery guns of the French, the deadly "mitrailleuse," the strong-arm of the French batteries. The French army is not now split up into remnants, as it was in 1870. It is a compact mass with reserves in the rear, able with British support to oppose weight and resistance to the momentum of the vast machine pressing from two directions upon the city. With the great machine weakened by its distance from base of supplies it will be a miracle of modern warfare if the German army is able to repeat history even so far as being able to invest Paris without actually taking it. And if Paris should fall, the war must still go on. For in 1870 there was but one focus; that was Paris. To-day there is a second; that is Berlin.

The removal of the seat of government from Paris to Bordeaux, though it looks panicky on the surface, is probably a wise precaution. Undoubtedly the German programme-makers expected to terrorize France by the impact of the machine.



This map summarises the movements of the opposing forces during the month of August. Broadly, the main German army has swept from outside Belgium, by way of Liege, Brussels and Namur into a line direct north-east of Paris. Little by little they have come nearer to the French capital, as the white squares show. At the end of last week they were about twenty-five miles north-east. The Allies (indicated by the black and white squares) made one real advance movement, that of Mons. Since that, however, they have retired, and re-retired, with the Germans in pursuit on their left and right, but not so much in the centre. The fighting in Alsace-Lorraine has been more or less of a guerilla character, and does not affect the main march to Paris.