

WAR WILL END WHERE IT BEGAN

WE have now passed the anniversary of the attack upon Verdun and we are still awaiting some indication of the areas that must bear the brunt of the new spring campaign. The delay is doubtless due to the weather, but we may none the less admire the secrecy that has covered whatever aggressive intentions may exist. But it is not likely that the uncertainty is shared by the rival commanders. It is only the telegraph lines and the mails that can be reduced to silence. There are not many secrets that can be kept intact within the war areas. The movements of large bodies of troops and of great guns can not be hidden from the ubiquitous aviator. At the same time it is possible to move both men and guns with great speed over the tangle of railroad lines that have done whatever is humanly possible to conquer both space and time. But at least there can be no large attack without many days of preliminary bombardment and there are no indications even of this. The only fighting at the present time is on the Ancre and the Somme, and there we see no more than the steady continuation of the British offensive that has already entered history under the name of the battle of the Somme and that was discontinued under stress of weather at the beginning of winter.

So far as this particular field is concerned it seems as though the British were advancing slowly and irresistibly, and this view is not negated by the official German bulletins. On February 15th, which is the latest date when net territorial results were presented to us, the British had gained ground on the Ancre to an average depth of three-quarters of a mile over a front of 9,000 yards, and Major-General Maurice, chief director of military operations, is responsible for the statement that the German prisoners taken exceed in number the total British casualties from all causes. In the Somme section the gains were less notable, being an average of three-quarters of a mile in depth over a front of about 1,000 yards. General Maurice says that the German prisoners include boys of seventeen and men over sixty years of age and that they show marked evidence of a decline in morale, sometimes abandoning villages without an attempt to defend them. But it would probably be a serious mistake to draw any general conclusions from such facts as these. If Germany intends to withdraw from this area to some new fortified lines in the rear she would naturally use her least reliable men for such a purpose, that is to say, the very young and the very old. And we can hardly suppose that these advances that are now a matter of nearly daily record are being carried out in the face of the best resistance that Germany can offer. They seem rather to point to a withdrawal of the best troops for service elsewhere and to the slow relinquishment of territory in deference to a greater tactical advantage elsewhere.

AND we may find a key to the whole military situation in the fact that Germany's single hope of profit from the war is to be found in the Balkans, and that whatever she may do anywhere is directed to that end. Germany is now in control not only of the Danube, but of the whole length of the international railroad that runs through Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and into Asia Minor. She would make peace to-morrow, she would thankfully abandon Belgium and France and everything that she has won elsewhere in exchange for the liberty to maintain her hold upon the Danube and the railroad. There is probably no sacrifice that she would not make to that end. It is the one thing that she is now fighting for. She would probably even evacuate Serbia if only she could control the railroad strip that passes through Nish and on to Sofia. That she should be tenacious of her French and Belgian gains is not due to the slightest expectation that she can retain those gains. She knows that she can not, not an inch of them. Probably her statesmen have never at any time expected to. But they are, or may be, useful cards in the game, serviceable in a bargain, and the

Germany will be glad to let everything go in the West if she can keep control of the Danube. So the war issue gets back to the Balkans again

B Y S I D N E Y C O R Y N

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goal of that bargain is to be found in the east. If we could determine the military measures that would most conduce to assure Germany in the continued control of the Danube and the international railroad we should then know exactly what she will do, and where she will strike in the coming campaign.

We can not be sure that she will strike at all or that a land offensive forms any part of her plans. It is quite possible that she intends to stand on the defensive everywhere and to pin her faith to her submarines. We may dismiss as wholly imaginary the stories of a great new army to be hurled unexpectedly and in overwhelming force upon some unforeseen part of the line. There can not be any new army of trained and dependable troops. The lines are now much longer than they were a year ago. German troops have been sent in large numbers to take over the positions held by the Austrians before Brusiloff's great offensive. The situation in Roumania has become a liability instead of an asset. The lines are steadily being bent backward, and therefore lengthened, on the Ancre and the Somme. The deportation of the Belgians is evidence of a shortage of men. The Russian and British armies are now very much larger than they were a year ago and their pressure will be much more formidable. It seems hardly likely that Germany can do more than hold her own or that she can be in a position to attempt some new feat after the Verdun pattern. On the other hand, we must remember that Germany has always placed an extraordinary reliance upon the psychological results of tremendous and dramatic deeds. It is true that the psychological results have not always, nor indeed ever, followed the deeds, but none the less it is a tendency that must be remembered. There is nothing inherently impossible in a German raid upon Holland or Switzerland, and in this connection we have the fact of the sinking of the Dutch ships. A raid of this sort would be impossible if purely military considerations were allowed to rule, but then this has never seemed to be the case. An invasion of Switzerland, if successful, might open the way to a new attack upon Italy and also to an attack upon the right flank of the French armies. But it would have to overcome the

fierce resistance of the Swiss and it would also open the same road to a counter attack by the French. And there is nothing despicable about either the Swiss army or the Swiss defences. Both are of the most formidable kind. And so far as Holland is concerned probably nothing would please the British more than the opportunity to send an army into the country.

It is necessary once more to be on our guard against the misleading headlines that accompany the reports of Lloyd George's speech before the House of Commons. There is no such corrective of false impressions as definite statistics, and although the statistics are not always as definite as might be wished they are none the less helpful in arriving at an understanding of the actual situation so far as the submarine warfare is concerned.

THE headlines are misleading because they attribute the crisis in the Allied shipping trade to the new submarine campaign. They invite the inference that the crisis was created by that campaign, and that we are now witnessing the realization of the forecasts with which that campaign was inaugurated. Now we may hold that view or not, just as we please and as our sympathies may dictate, but to attribute that view to Lloyd George is hardly sustained by anything to be found in his speech. Still less can it be sustained by the statistical facts, whether we seek those facts from Allied sources or from Teutonic sources.

Lloyd George sketched a grave situation, and inasmuch as he had to make an appeal to the nation for self-sacrifice he sketched it in heavy and sombre lines. About the gravity of the situation there can be no doubt, but he did not say that it was a new situation, or that there were any elements of novelty, submarine or otherwise, about it. On the contrary, he indicated that it was a culmination of difficulties that had been growing steadily larger in bulk rather than in kind, and that while the submarines were an important factor they were not a new factor nor the only factor. Great Britain, before the war, he said, had only barely enough tonnage for her trade. Any diminution of her tonnage meant, therefore, a restriction of supplies. At the end of 1916 her tonnage was 20,000,000, which is practically the same as she had before the war began. A large amount of this, an increasing amount, must be deducted for purely military purposes, and therefore a substantial restriction in consumption had made itself inevitable almost before the armies had come to grips. The German authorities place the tonnage reduction for military purposes at about 13,000,000, which would leave about 7,000,000 for ordinary purposes of supply. Even if we suppose that the German estimate is exaggerated, and it would naturally tend in that direction, we see at once that a severe shortage became inevitable from the withdrawal of ships for military ends. Now Lloyd George enumerated three causes for the present crisis. Prefacing his remarks by the remainder, already noticed, that Great Britain had only just enough ships for her purposes before the war, he said that there had been an enormous increase in the demand for tonnage, that 1,000,000 tons had been lent to France alone, and large amounts to Russia and Italy, and as a final cause for the pinch he spoke of the ships that had been sunk by submarines, a process that has been going on, of course, since the beginning of the war.

LLOYD GEORGE'S tonnage speech indicates no crisis caused by submarines. The first month of intensified sub campaign has sprung no sensation. Tonnage difficulties began long ago, with the diversion of ships for military purposes. It was merely accentuated by the submarine revival which is fifty per cent. bluff according to German estimates. For the first two weeks of February, in spite of submarines, the daily average of ships arriving at and leaving British ports was 669. Submarines actually sunk only one ship in every 100.

NOW we may believe what we wish about the new campaign, but before assuming that Lloyd George shares those beliefs, it would be well to ascertain what he actually said. And he made no reference to any sudden accentuation of the danger nor to any new element that had entered into the situation. The problem that he presented was one that began with the first diversion of shipping to military purposes. It has grown steadily larger with the allotments of ships to Allied countries and with the continuous tale of sunken vessels. Now at last it has attained the dimensions of a crisis. Lloyd