

WHY DID GERMANY DECAMP?

A LAYMAN need feel no reluctance to confess himself baffled in his effort to understand the meaning of the German retirement on the Ancre. The military experts seem to be equally baffled, if we may judge from the variety of theories that are now being advanced. Some unnamed military authorities in Switzerland are said to favour the opinion that Germany is withdrawing from her fortifications in order that she may put all her fortunes to the touch of a pitched battle in the open field. It is quite an enticing theory, but it will hardly stand the test of the facts. If Germany had any such plan in mind we should see a general withdrawal from the trenches, and not merely a retirement over so small an area as that of the Somme front. Moreover, it is hardly conceivable that the German commanders could believe that such a move would be in their favour. They are outnumbered nearly two to one. The Allies have far more and far better guns, and their supply of ammunition is immeasurably superior. We may easily believe, too, that their military skill is superior, and this is said, not in any spirit of disparagement, but on the simple principle of judging a tree by its fruits. Certainly the Germans were outgeneraled at Verdun. They have been outgeneraled in the Champagne fighting, and they are now being outgeneraled on the Ancre and the Somme. If Germany were to invite a pitched battle on an open field the courage of her men would not save them from being swept away by superior numbers, and by an artillery fire with which she could not compete. We may remember that we have seen one great battle in the open, and only one, since the war began, and that was the battle of the Marne. Germany was then in her full strength, and we may suppose that the rival armies were nearly equally matched numerically, but the Germans were not only defeated; they were routed. It does not seem likely that they will try it again.

THERE seems no reason to resort to far-fetched theories of this kind so long as a careful study of the map supplies us with better and more obvious ones. If we look at the contour lines of the fortifications that run north and south from the sea to Noyon we shall notice a large westward bulge with Bapaume and Arras at its eastern extremities. It is, in fact, a sort of pocket of the kind that soldiers call a salient. Now it is evident that a pocket of this kind that projects into the enemy's lines can be attacked not only from the front, but also from its two sides, and that, therefore, it is particularly vulnerable. Now, a salient may have many advantages if only it can be sustained and defended. It is an annoyance to the enemy because, if it is strong enough, it threatens to pierce his lines, and also because he dares not leave it in his rear. But a salient that can not be used for offensive purposes, while demanding large numbers of men for its defence, becomes a dangerous nuisance to its owner, since it can not only be attacked from its three exposed sides, but it can be cut off and assailed also from the rear by an enemy force that is strong enough to envelop it. Now, the Germans certainly had nothing to gain from this particular salient. They were not strong enough to use it as a lance point for their further advance, and it became a positive peril to them as soon as the British forces began to creep toward Bapaume, and so to work around to its rear. What more natural, then, than that the Germans should begin an evacuation that would shorten their line and therefore economize their men? Whether the British artillery could in any case have compelled such an evacuation is another matter. Probably it could, but much more slowly. If we are to suppose that the Germans held on to the last possible moment, that they were actually blasted from their trenches, then indeed they are in a parlous state, because the same performance can be repeated indefinitely. But the retirement was certainly an orderly one. There were very few captured guns or prisoners, while the reports speak of the elaborate care taken by the Ger-

Writing on March 14th, Mr. Coryn necessarily says nothing about the great German retreat, three days later. On March 17th the Germans gave up about 900 square miles on a front of about 90 miles. A retreat without a battle

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mans to destroy whatever they could not move. Doubtless the fog helped them substantially, but it is no small feat to move heavy guns without loss, and without even a protecting fire from the rear, as was the case here.

None the less the German position in France is becoming increasingly serious. Indeed there are portents that speak eloquently of something like desperation. It is not for nothing that every German statesman says that his country is staking everything upon her submarine campaign. For that is what she is doing. If Germany can not hold her gains at Verdun, or in the Champagne district, if she finds it necessary or even only advisable, to withdraw on the Ancre, how can she expect to resist an offensive anywhere on the western front? Whatever importance may attach to the salient between Bapaume and Arras, there is another salient of far more importance, the great salient marked by Noyon, and we may be sure that the fighting on the Somme and the Ancre has the Noyon salient, or angle, for its main objective. The Bapaume-Arras salient may be said to be a small salient within the greater salient of Noyon, and we may note with interest that the British have now taken over the north and south line nearly as far as Noyon. The battle of the Somme is steadily crushing in the northern line of that greater angle. A French offensive in the Champagne district would crush in the southern line, if it were successful. Noyon is the nearest point of the German forces to Paris, and a retirement here would almost certainly mean a retirement from France altogether, and the taking up of a new position along the Belgian frontier. This would straighten the whole German line from the sea to Verdun, and thence to Strassburg. A week or so ago I suggested that the Champagne district would be the most probable scene of a French offensive, as corresponding with the British offensive on the Ancre, and combining with that offensive to constitute a threat to the great Noyon salient. It is too soon to say that this view has been confirmed, but we may none the less note the very heavy fighting of which this is now the scene, and the gradual blazing up of the flame from Verdun westward. And the half-hearted renewal of the German attacks upon Verdun seem to show that the Germans are alive to the dangers of a Champagne success that would not only compel a retirement from Noyon, but that would cut off the Verdun army of the Crown Prince from its western connections.

There is a popular belief—one might almost call it a superstition—that Germany has always some scheme of almost superhuman cleverness ready to put into operation, and that we must constantly be on the watch for some master stroke of strategy. Perhaps she has well earned that reputation by the thoroughness of her preparations, by her admirable attention to detail, and by her general concentration upon the art of war. But these things are not quite the same as the comprehensive vision, the power to foresee results, that constitute true military genius. And of true military genius Germany has shown hardly a spark. Her successes have been due to her men, and not to their leaders. She has won in spite of her generals. Over and over again, and particularly at Verdun, in Roumania, by the Zeppelin campaign, and by her submarine war, she has shown an invincible determination to do the things that are not worth doing, in the confident certainty that they will produce results that they could not conceivably produce. She strikes with immense force, not so much that she may overthrow something that is worth overthrowing, but rather that she may show how hard she can strike, no matter if it be only at a

stone wall. To take Verdun would have been of no value to her, but to try to take Verdun and to fail was disastrous. The partial conquest of Roumania has not helped her in the least. Quite the contrary. It could not help her. She has simply created another battle line that has locked up an army and brought it to a futile standstill. The Zeppelins are an avowed and confessed failure, as all the aviating world knew that they must be. And

while it is too soon to speak positively of her submarine campaign, it has at least had the effect of sending to sea a number of American ships with guns, and with orders to use them without hesitation or parley. All these things were done to produce a psychological effect, in other words, to terrify. But a real generalship, a far-sighted leadership, would have known that there would be, and could be, no psychological effect, no terror whatever.

THEREFORE there is no reason to believe that Germany has something "up her sleeve." It is nearly certain that she has not, at least nothing that can change the military situation. That she will invade Switzerland is nearly unthinkable. It is not quite so unthinkable that she will invade Holland. There are half a dozen points where she may strike some heavy blows, but if they are to have any real chance of success it will be by incurring the most deadly dangers elsewhere. Her lines are too long, and too thinly held, to permit of any but the most transient concentrations. If she could secure a success against Russia it will be because internal conditions in that country have served to paralyze the Russian armies, as they did once before. But that, of course, is outside the scope of a military review.

While it is still too soon to speak positively of the submarine campaign it is not too soon to recognize that the German U boats during the first month of their "new" campaign have done less than half of what they intended to do, and asserted that they could do. That is to say, they expected—or said that they expected—to sink a million tons a month, and actually they have sunk less than half a million tons. But we have still another evidence of relative failure in the statistics of the trade of Great Britain during the month of February. The exports to America from London during that month were actually greater than during the preceding February. In February, 1917, the exports from London to America were valued at \$14,061,276, against a value of \$12,231,166 in February of 1916, an increase of \$1,690,110.

That popular elation in Germany is at least premature is shown by the warning issued by Captain Persius, the able German expert on naval affairs.

Captain Persius foresees the inevitable public disappointment at U boat performances, and strives to mitigate it. He says nothing about the starving of Great Britain, and does not seem even to consider it as one of the German aims, which are "to impede the provisioning of the British Isles, the sending of military supplies, materials, and other requirements." To impede is not quite the same as to prevent, and we may suppose that the difference between the two terms must have a somewhat chilling effect upon public fervour. Captain Persius also believes—as of course is obvious—that Lloyd George's alarmist speech was purposely gloomy in order to promote frugality at home, and he finally warns his readers that "we must have patience; must not assume that the goal is attainable in a few months. By excessive expectation we should only depreciate the work of the submarines."

IT may be permissible to point once more to the vital nature of the operations in Asia Minor. Bagdad has fallen, and the Arab tribesmen in immense numbers have taken the field against Turkey, and are proving of incalculable assistance to the British forces that are moving northward, and to the Russian army that is now moving southward. If this were the time or the place for such a purpose it would be easy to picture the almost incredible change that has snatched the sovereignty of the Moham-