

NIVELLE and HAIG have FOOLED HINDENBURG

BEFORE these lines appear in print the Battle of Arras, or at least its present phase, will belong to history. Fighting of such desperate determination, of such reckless ferocity, cannot be long continued. And it will determine whether the German armies remain in France or whether they retreat to the Belgian frontier.

Last week it became evident that the German forces before Arras would retire to the Drocourt-Queant line which they call the Siegfried Line. This has now been accomplished, and what we have begun to call the Battle of Arras is for the possession of that line. It is about ten miles to the east of Arras, it is quite straight, and its extremities form an equilateral triangle with Arras. The retirement was necessitated by the capture of Vimy which is about five miles to the north of Arras, and about three miles due south of Lens. Lens lies now in a sort of deep pocket, and we are told that the Germans are destroying it preparatory to its evacuation. They cannot hold it for much longer. Above Lens the opposing lines stretch away northward about fifty miles to the North Sea, the extremity of the line being held by the Belgians. The retirement from Vimy to the Drocourt-Queant line means not only the pocketing of Lens, and therefore its capture. It means that the northern line from Lens to the North Sea is now to the westward of the British armies, that it has been cut, so to speak, from its southerly connections and left behind in the movement eastward. The British army is now at its rear, a position that will become still more accentuated with the taking of Lens, or of Douai, which is slightly further east, and it will then have to fall back, thus involving the German marine base at Zeebrugge. The easy capture of Vimy by the Canadians indicates a very marked German demoralization. The Canadians seem to have romped over the ridge with an ease that surprised themselves, and they found its defenders stunned by the bombardment and weakened by a lack of the supplies that had been barred from them for days by the British fire. Vimy, like Bapaume, was one of the "Impregnable" German fortifications, and it owed its importance to the fact that it was the most easterly of the hill ranges in the Artois district. Looking down from Vimy one sees the broad, level ground that stretches away for miles to the eastward. With Vimy gone there was no chance to hold the line southward through Monchy to Croiselles, and hence the retreat to the Drocourt-Queant line.

THE present situation is an intensely interesting one. If we look at the lines before the German retirement began we shall see that they had the rough form of a rectangle stretching north and south from the North Sea to Noyon, and west and east from Noyon to Verdun. The German retreat was in the general direction of a flattening out of that angle by substituting for it a straight line from Lens to Craonne, to the south of Laon. The new line joins the old one at these two places, and they thus become of the nature of hinges connecting the old and the new. The original and still existing lines therefore stretch from Lens northward to the sea, and from Craonne eastward to Verdun and Metz. Now the British and French armies are engaged in the task of bursting open these hinges, and of prying the new lines away from the old ones. This is why the British attacked Vimy, and why the French are pushing on to Craonne. If they succeed in detaching the new line from its northern and southern supports, not only is the new line "in the air," but it will be forced to retreat under circumstances that might easily spell disaster. This would mean also the retreat of the fifty mile line from Lens to the sea, which would then be cut from its supports and outflanked. But it would mean something far more important. If the French can break the line at Craonne it would endanger the whole of the German line to the east. It would mean that the army of the Crown Prince would at once be outflanked from the west, and probably also from the east, since the French forces at Verdun, or eastward of Verdun, would also attack. The German bulletins now announce somewhat tardily that the southern ex-

CORYN'S picturesque phrase about the Canadians "romping over the ridge" suggests that Germany's western armies are irretrievably beaten. It is well on the cards that we are about to witness a disaster to the German arms that will send all their forces in ruin to the frontier. And as to the submarine—he quotes Carson.

By SIDNEY CORYN

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tremity of their line has been forced back from the Aisne, and we read of a steady French advance northward in pursuit, a "hesitating" advance, as the German bulletins like to put it. The British, after a pause of a few days for consolidation, are now again striking heavily, mainly to the direct east of Arras at the Drocourt-Queant line or Cambrai, and this action is the present Battle of Arras. The German line is now at the moment of writing so twisted and dented as to form a continuous succession of salients, but we may form some general idea of the situation and of the Allied intentions if we remember that wherever the German line is dented to the eastward there is immediately constituted a danger to the other portions of the line immediately to the north and south, since they then become menaced by an attack from three sides. Moreover every dent in the line is a practical lengthening of the line which therefore requires more men to defend it. The German effort is to straighten their line and to keep it straight. The British, by their alternate right and left hand blows, now toward Douai and now toward Cambrai, are preventing that straightening process, and creating successive salients or dents that compel a retirement in order to straighten them out. There is one other point upon which we should do well to clear our minds. The main hope of the British command is not so much to push the German lines back as to pierce them. If the lines can be pierced, it may be possible to cut their communications, and to envelop them, which means, of course, their surrender. If the Germans before Arras should presently fall back, as they must do, it will be due not so much to direct pressure as to the fear of being pierced and enveloped. It is the rigid line that can be pierced. Elastic lines are more difficult to handle.

The battle has now progressed sufficiently far to justify some forecast as to its immediate future. The Germans by their retirement from the Somme admitted that they were unable to hold the most powerful fortifications that were ever built. By their relinquishment of Bapaume they showed their inability to hold a fortified city that they had declared to be impregnable. The loss of Vimy proved that even the aid of such natural features as a hilly ridge peculiarly adapted for defence was of no avail to save them. The French have forced them back from the Aisne, where they were supported by a river as well as by fortifications perfected by the work of three years. The British are now steadily blasting their way across open country, and their enemies are unable to hold them. In other words, the battlefield now offers all the natural conditions of war that France can furnish, and under all of these conditions the Germans are being beaten back. What chance is there to retrieve the fortunes that are now ebbing so fast?

Speaking from the purely military point of view there is no chance whatever. Nivelle and Haig have pitted their wits against Hindenburg and they have beaten him. They have done none of the things that Hindenburg assumed they would do. He believed that he could throw them into confusion by a

sudden and secret retreat from the Somme. So far from being thrown into confusion, it is now evident that the German plans were known and provided for. He believed that he could secure such a start as to make the Hindenburg line a reality instead of a myth. He was caught before there was time even to make dug outs to shelter his men. He supposed that he could seize the initiative and dictate the place and manner of the fighting. He found that the initiative was with the Allies, and that he must hurry his armies from point to point only to discover that his agile foes were attacking the place that he had just weakened by withdrawals. And he was to discover something still more disastrous, that the bombardment to which he was subjected was so continuous and so intense as to destroy the morale of his men, and to isolate them at will from reinforcements and from supplies. Perhaps the growing demoralization of the German soldier is the most sinister fact that now confronts the German command. The number of unwounded prisoners shows that it is a real demoralization. Speaking, therefore, with every proper caution we may reasonably believe that the tide cannot now be turned in favor of the German arms, that there cannot be any military development that will work substantially in their favor, and that their western armies are irretrievably beaten. They cannot continue to hold the ground that they now occupy. If they venture upon another general retirement it will be under fire and with all the chances against them. It will mean also the retirement of their line to the far north. If they do not withdraw they may find at any moment that their line is not only dented, but actually pierced and that very large parts of their forces are in danger of envelopment. It is well on the cards that we are about to witness a disaster to the German arms and one that will send all their forces in ruin to the frontier.

SIR EDWARD CARSON, speaking in the House of Commons, gave an explanation of the admiralty policy of concealing the details of German submarine losses. He said: "I am often asked, and my predecessors have often been asked, Why it is the admiralty have not from time to time published the number of German submarines destroyed? It has been pointed out to me by many members, and with considerable force, that the daily toll of British merchant shipping is published to the world, but nothing is said about the losses the enemy incurs in the submarine campaign, the effect being that all the honour appears to rest with the enemy, and that apparently nothing is being done on our part to cope with this menace." But there was another side to the question. "I have no doubt myself that the policy of silence pursued by successive boards of the admiralty about the losses of enemy submarines is the policy that the enemy dislikes most. Just see what it is. A submarine starts out on its campaign of murder, and all the enemy knows is that it does not return home. What has happened is a complete mystery to them. They can not tell whether the submarine was lost from a defect of construction or design, which is a very important matter, or some error of navigation, or whether her loss was due to one or other of the methods that the British admiralty has devised for her destruction." A second point made by Sir Edward was that if the admiralty were immediately to announce the destruction of an enemy submarine the enemy "would know without waiting that a relief for that particular boat was required and they would at once dispatch another submarine, if available, to operate against our ships. I would rather leave them to imagine that they are there when they are not. As it is the enemy can not know for some time the exact number of their submarines that have been operating at any particular moment." Sir Edward Carson went on to point out that it was not always possible to say with certainty that a submarine has been destroyed. "All we know is that from day to day and from week to week reports come to us of engagements with enemy submarines, and it follows of necessity that the results range from the certain, through the probable, down to the possible and the improbable.