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WHAT'S DOING IN THE WAR

IT was suggested last week that the Germans were relinquishing their western campaign and that the series of withdrawals witnessed during the last two or three weeks were almost in the nature of rear-guard actions. There were various reasons to support such a view, and other reasons have now become apparent. First of all there was the obvious fact of overwhelming necessity. Russia had advanced against the Austrians with dramatic success. Italy had done the same. The tide had turned at Verdun. The Allied victories in Picardy, although relatively small, were distinct and continuous. German efforts to produce a diversion in northern Russia had failed. Although at first we were inclined to believe that some great counterstroke must be in preparation somewhere, it became slowly apparent that nothing of the sort was to be expected, that the Teutonic allies were already straining every nerve, and that there were no new resources upon which they could fall back. The hostile circle around them was slowly and inexorably shrinking simply because the defensive forces were spread out so thinly everywhere as to be effective nowhere. Under such circumstances it seemed reasonable to believe that there must be a relative abandonment of one field for the sake of concentration upon another. The defensive circle must accept an inward bulge in one place in the hope of effecting a compensatory outward bulge elsewhere. But the withdrawal from the western field was to be slow and obstinately contested so as to produce the greatest possible loss to the Allies for the least possible gain. None the less the withdrawal was to be intentional and planned. For this view there seemed to be additional support in the relative weakness of the German counter attacks in Picardy as compared with the vigour of their Verdun campaign. This did not seem to be accounted for by the superiority of the British artillery. It appeared to point to a gradual withdrawal of forces

By SIDNEY CORYN

precisely calculated to the end in view.

We have now three items of news that may be interpreted as confirmatory. The first is the removal of the Teutonic headquarters to the east and Von Hindenburg's pronouncement that the war will be decided there, and not in the west. The second is the significant statement emanating from Berlin that henceforth unimportant areas will not be defended at an undue cost of life. The third is the report that German forces have been removed from the Dutch frontier and that large numbers of Belgians are now crossing unhindered into Belgium. The frontier is about five hundred miles long and it must have occupied a large number of troops that have evidently now been withdrawn for service elsewhere.

WHILE neither of these reports is in any way conclusive of an intention to retire the German lines in France, they certainly point in that direction. At least they show that the centre of gravity has once more shifted. We may even surmise that Von Falkenhayn and Von Hindenburg were in agreement as to the necessity for shortening the lines, but not as to the way in which this was to be done; that Von Falkenhayn advocated the abandonment of the Balkan campaign, while Von Hindenburg believed that the western lines should be weakened. The east is, of course, Von Hindenburg's peculiar field, where all his laurels have been won. The emperor, for reasons of statecraft, would naturally side with Von Hindenburg, since a withdrawal from the Balkans would mean the abandonment of the railroad to Asia, as well as a practical throwing of Austria to the wolves. In this connection it is interesting to note a speculation by the unusually clear-sighted military writer of the New York Evening Post. He says: "To what extent is the steady

yielding of the German lines on the Somme involuntary? How far is it a part of the plan which the advent of Von Hindenburg has

brought into the field of discussion, namely, the abandonment of the German lines in the west for a concentration against Russia or Roumania? If such a plan is in contemplation of execution it is idle to suppose that the Germans would announce it by a formal and open retirement. Rather it would be a case of feeding back to the Allies as much territory as necessary, at the heaviest price obtainable. To keep up appearances there would even be the formality of the counter attack. Such attacks have been delivered by the Germans, but with very little success. It is a different story from the vehemence with which the Germans 'came back' after successful French efforts around Verdun." The expression "feeding back" is an excellent one. It conveys precisely the idea of a rear-guard action on a vast scale.

Still another piece of confirmatory evidence comes at the moment of writing in the form of an interview given by the Crown Prince Rupprecht, of Bavaria, to Dr. Hale, of the International News Service. The interview is undated, the report having been suppressed by the British censor and subsequently transmitted by wireless. The Crown Prince refers to the Allied gains on the Somme and says satirically that they can be seen with the microscope. He then adds, "Amplly and in full count they have paid for every foot of ground sold them. They can have all they want at the same price." Allowing for the unpremeditated nature of the interview, the remark seems to point to a willingness to cede territory so long as the price exacted is sufficiently high. That the Allies "can have all they want at the same price" is certainly not an indication of an intention to stand firm at all costs. On the contrary it seems to indicate an intention, in the quoted words of the Evening Post, "of feeding back to the Allies as much territory as necessary at the heaviest price obtainable."

SIR WILFRID AT MAISONNEUVE

By TOM KING

SIR WILFRID LAURIER has something of the good fortune that attended the late Queen Victoria in always bringing good weather with him. For several weeks we have been having cold, raw and muggy days in Toronto, but on Wednesday, September 27th, Montreal fairly revelled in the brightness and warmth of a September sun. The evening air was as soft and fleecy as an afternoon in Indian summer.

Maisonneuve is now an integral part of the city of Montreal. It is, by the way, the most populous parliamentary riding in Canada, being even larger than the city of Winnipeg. A modest advertisement in the Montreal morning papers announced that Sir Wilfrid would address an open-air meeting at St. Andrew's Boulevard. It was taken for granted that he would bring the "Laurier weather" with him, and this confidence was not misplaced. True, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon the dazzling sunlight faded and dark clouds began to hover on the horizon, yet no rain fell, and when darkness came one could see here and there stars peeping through a somewhat leaden sky. One found the place of meeting after an interminable street car ride. The car seemed to turn at every corner, but its course was steadily north and east, and, finally, after miles of riding, one could discern a square outlined by beads of electric light. The "boulevard" turned out to be a square or plazza between two streets, flanked on one side by a church. By half-past seven o'clock it was black with people waiting patiently and quietly for the meeting that was advertised to begin at half-past eight.

Just what Maisonneuve was ten years ago I am unable to say, but the thickly settled district about St. Andrew's boulevard was then moor and pasture, with here and there a little market gardening. But Maisonneuve, then, as now, was an industrial centre, and the home of French-speaking artisans. Hence it happened that in 1906 a by-election, caused by the death of the late Hon. Raymond Prefontaine, Alfonse Verville, a plumber, was returned to the House of

Commons as a Labour representative. Mr. Verville defeated the Liberal nominee, but at the same time he professed himself to be a follower of Sir Wilfrid.

It was Mr. Verville who called the meeting. The 15,000 people who responded were mainly French-Canadians. Many of them, no doubt, understood English, but, naturally, they preferred to hear their mother tongue. All the addresses were, therefore, in French. Sir Wilfrid speaks English with classic elegance; I think, however, he speaks with more vigour and emotion when he uses his mother tongue. Certainly, he was never in better form than at the meeting in Maisonneuve. His voice never broke nor even frayed during the hour's discourse. Several of the local orators, less trained in the art of public speaking, tried to reach the vast audience by a megaphone delivery. They soon became hoarse and tired and made frequent rushes for the water pitcher. Sir Wilfrid spoke easily without apparent effort, and with no visible strain. He perspired freely, but otherwise finished as fresh as when he commenced.

In placing the crowd at fifteen thousand I am merely making an estimate based upon the superficial area of the square and allowing about four feet of space for every person present. I know the crowd was so dense that there was no room for the Liberal clubs which marched from the city with brass bands to participate. The disappointed musicians finding themselves to be too late for any service at the meeting, moved away and entertained the home-keeping populace. Every now and then, while Sir Wilfrid was speaking, we could hear one band energetically playing "O Canada," while the rival organization, perhaps a mile distant, was rendering "The Marseilles."

There seemed to be practically no police supervision, and little was needed. A Quebec crowd at a political meeting had much the appearance of

worshippers in a church. The orator is not encouraged as he might be in Ontario, with commendatory cries and sporadic outbursts of frantic chering. The reason, I think is, that the political meetings in Quebec are so often held after high mass on Sunday in the square before the parish church. The people seem to listen to a political speech in much the same way as they listen to a sermon. The volatile, excitable, shrilly shouting Frenchman is a myth the Anglo-Saxon will never give up, but I often wonder who on earth invented him.

Yet the audience that listened to Sir Wilfrid the other night more than once forgot itself long enough to give unmistakable evidence of appreciation. Indeed, when Sir Wilfrid is in action one finds it difficult to resist the spell that a born orator casts upon those who hear him. Even though you did not understand a word of French you found yourself thrilled and interested, as years ago thousands were thrilled with deepest emotion by Tomaso Salvini and Sara Bernhardt.

The Maisonneuve meeting, ostensibly called in the interest of the Labour party, became the inaugural meeting of the Liberal National campaign. This was done so adroitly that no one seemed to notice the transformation. Mr. Verville is a Labourite with such Liberal leanings that his constituents may be excused for getting the two parties confused or blending them together.

With the matter of the speech I do not propose to deal. It was not controversial in character. But the scene was picturesque, and, in its way, impressive. Those who heard the Liberal chieftain could not doubt his ability to run another general election. How that election may result, no one can tell. Sir Wilfrid may again be Prime Minister, or he may retire to private life. What the Maisonneuve meeting disclosed was, that Sir Wilfrid is still in command, and that age has not withered nor custom staled his infinite variety.