

SOP TO THE GERMAN PUBLIC

MAJOR MORAHT, the German military expert, tells us, or rather he tells the German people, that the retirement from the Ancre is for strategical reasons. It is one of those phrases that sound well, but that actually have very little meaning. All military movements are for strategical reasons; otherwise they would not be undertaken. It is true that the early withdrawal was orderly, and therefore premeditated, although at the moment of writing we are told that it is becoming disorderly, and is taking on some of the aspects of a rout. But if it was not originally a rout it was none the less the alternative to a rout. The German defences were practically destroyed by an artillery fire without a parallel in the war, and they could certainly have been taken with the bayonet. Major Morahit then goes on to say that the British will now find that they must fight over extraordinarily difficult ground and he infers that this was one of the reasons for the retreat. Now all this is evidently for home consumption, and for the solace of a German public opinion that is growing sensitive and suspicious. The British reports say that the new ground is preferable to the old, and we have also the fact that the Germans have been defending this ground stubbornly ever since the Battle of the Somme opened last summer until the present moment. In the early stages of the war the German bulletins were fairly accurate, but they are anything but accurate now. The British advances are concealed until they can be concealed no more, and then they are announced as though they were German victories. All of which is eloquent of apprehension and distrust at home.

But Major Morahit is evidently trying to discount the future as well as to explain the past. He would prepare his readers for other news of a like nature. It is probable that Bapaume will be taken before these lines are in print, and this will mean a serious embarrassment to the German communications on their north and south line from the sea to Noyon. If the Germans are willing to evacuate their lines in the Ancre district and to surrender Bapaume, it is highly likely that they must presently surrender Peronne also, and even withdraw altogether from the great salient at Noyon and fall back toward the Belgian frontier. There is a good road running through Bapaume to the south as far as Peronne, while from Peronne there is a railroad immediately behind the German lines that continue southward to Noyon, and while these roads are probably not vital to the German communications their loss would be a grave inconvenience. It is hard, therefore, to resist the conviction that the present German retirement is a prelude to something much larger, and that "strategical reasons" are about to compel the abandonment of extensive lines that have been held fast ever since the Battle of the Marne.

OFFICIALLY we have been told nothing about the great extension of the British lines southward, but the fact that there has been an extension is no longer concealed. It will be remembered that at the opening of the Battle of the Somme the British were holding the Ancre district and advancing toward Bapaume, while the French, under Foch, were on the Somme and moving against Peronne. After a time there was a slackening of the French attack on Peronne, and presently it ceased altogether. Now we learn from the bulletins that the British forces are at Roye, which is well to the south of Peronne and close to Noyon, and so it becomes evident that the British have extended their lines southward until they now occupy about one-third of the whole western front, which includes practically the entire north and south formation. In all probability the British will presently move right around the Noyon angle until they occupy a full half of the front. And as this means the liberation of a larger number of French troops we may legitimately ask ourselves what is to be done with them, and how they will be employed.

Writing some two weeks ago I suggested that the

All this talk about the Invincibility of the Hindenburg Line. The Strategy of the German Retirement is probably not Hindenburg's at all, but Nivalle's and Haig's. The French may yet Invade Germany by way of Metz instead of via Belgium

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EDITOR'S NOTE

READERS of the Coryn War Summary in the Courier will recognize in this week's article, as in others, that Mr. Coryn writes under the disadvantage of time. That is to say, he is compelled to write to-day what is not intended to reach the public until next week. In that interval many things may happen, and any writer less posted on the facts, less familiar with the ground where the armies are fighting, less shrewd in judgment and wise in military understanding, might be expected to make serious blunders in anticipating the course of events. But in spite of disadvantages, Mr. Coryn has won a place of distinction among the four or five best "war summary writers" of the English-speaking world. Those who have followed his writings in the Courier will be able to recall no instance in which the prognosis has been at fault to any serious extent, if indeed at all. It is because of Mr. Coryn's unusual gifts in the analysis of the week's news from all fronts, and his unfailingly illuminative comment that the Courier has secured his services for its readers even in spite of the fact that so much time has to elapse between the writing and the reading of the articles.

Those who have followed this weekly review will remember that several months ago Coryn outlined the earlier phases of what is now taking place. In our issue of Oct. 7, 1916, he said:

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 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 precisely calculated to the end in view.

From time to time the writer has returned to his view and from week to week the slow development of events on the two great fronts has justified his estimate. The events that have revolutionized the outlook during the past few days are but the magnified sequel to months of this surrender of territory on the west front.

In the article on this page it will be seen that the Russian situation had not developed quite as clearly when the "copy" was completed as it has developed in the last few days. The retreat of the Germans from the Noyon Angle was only beginning. Nevertheless, allowing for the greater gains made on the West Front, and for the advancement in the Petrograd situation, the article is timely. It is several weeks now since this withdrawal from the Noyon Angle was prophesied in this department. It is some time, too, since the failure of the new "ruthless" submarine campaign was prognosticated. Mr. Coryn does not pretend to be a prophet and his success in foreseeing the trend of events is not mentioned with a view to proving that he has the gift of pre-vision. We submit, however—with perhaps pardonable pride in the fact—that for all around good sense and worthwhile comment the Coryn War Summary stands in a class of its own.

French offensive would be directed toward the Champagne district. In such a move there would be the obvious advantage of crushing in the Noyon angle from the south, while the British exercised a similar pressure from the north, although the Germans would certainly not wait for such an envelopment as this. In partial confirmation of this view we have the present heavy fighting in the Champagne district, in which the French seem to be winning

some notable successes. But there is another direction that may be ultimately favoured by the French staff, and that certainly has much to recommend it. A movement that carried the war actually on to German soil might have an effect upon the future of the struggle that would actually be more valuable than much greater successes, territorially measured, elsewhere. Now the right wing of the French armies in the neighbourhood of Verdun is within artillery range of German soil. The biggest French guns could throw their shells into Metz at the present moment, and it is quite possible that the French authorities mean to strike here in order that an actual invasion of Germany may produce the moral effects that would certainly not be lacking. It can be argued reasonably that while it would be good to crush in the Noyon angle and to advance toward Belgium from the east and the north, it would be a much better thing actually to invade Germany, and that while the Allied forces on the Somme are some two hundred miles from German soil the French forces on the eastern lines are within sight of that promised land. To attempt to weigh the probabilities would be futile except to soldiers who are on the spot, but we need not suppose that we are once more destined to witness, month after month, an advance that is measured by yards. The fighting on the Ancre is but the introduction to some immense effort over a wide field, and an effort that is intended to end the war before the return of winter. We may remind ourselves that the Germans have been explaining their Verdun venture on the ground that it was intended to prevent just such an invasion of Germany as has been suggested, and that inasmuch as it did prevent such an invasion it was successful. But then the German apologists have always been fertile in explaining their own defeats.

A CORRESPONDENT asks what would be the actual advantage to Germany from a shortening of her lines. That, of course, would depend upon the extent to which they were shortened. Roughly speaking, we may say that about three thousand men to the mile are required for the defence of first and second lines, although much, of course, depends upon the activity of the sector. But taking this number as an average, it is evident that even a slight curtailment of the front produces a substantial result in economized man power. The length of the present lines from the sea to Verdun is about 260 miles, but if the lines ran in a straight stretch from point to point the distance would be only about 190 miles. At the rate of three thousand men to the mile this would mean a saving of 210,000 men, a considerable army.

American Ambassador Gerard, who has just returned from Berlin, is unofficially reported to have said that the German public is placing its full and absolute reliance upon the U boats, and that a demonstration of their failure would mean an irresistible demand for an immediate peace. German statesmen have said practically the same thing, apparently indifferent to the fact that such assertions constitute a confession of military failure. German newspapers are nearly unanimous in their hysterical acclamation of the submarine as the one remaining trump card that can bring the game to a triumphant end with the taking of all the tricks.

Of course the submarine has already failed. That is to say, it has not accomplished one-half of the task so confidently allotted to it. It was expected to destroy one million tons of shipping a month, and it has destroyed less than half a million tons, while its power has been steadily waning since the be-