

# A SEARCH-LIGHT ON GERMANY

By SIDNEY CORYN

EVENTS are moving significantly fast on the western front, so fast as to persuade us that Sir Douglas Haig has the largest aims in view and that he intends to attain them before winter shall put an end to the fighting. Indeed, it would be hard to exaggerate the possibilities of the present situation or the results that seem now to be so well within reach. Much depends upon the weather. Still more depends upon the unfolding of the political situation in Germany. If both should prove favourable to the Allied cause, we may expect to see the dealing of a death blow to the German armies within a month. If they should be forced from their holdings on the North Sea, from Ostend and from Zeebrugge, their prestige would be gone forever. Not even the wiles of German statecraft could persuade the people that victory was still attainable.

The fighting of the past week is an integral part of the great battle that began when the Canadians stormed Vimy Ridge. Vimy is a part of the long straggling hogback that runs north to Poelcapelle, that was valued by the Germans because it gave command of the Flanders plains to the east, and that was believed by them to be impregnable. The position may be said to constitute the great curve or salient that has been driven by the British to the east of Ypres. So long as the ridge remained in German hands it served to protect the submarine bases at Ostend, Zeebrugge and Bruges. It protected also the railroad from Ostend to Lille, of almost vital importance to the German communications. We have now seen that ridge snatched piecemeal from German possession. It is nearly entirely in the hands of the British, and already they are descending its eastern slope, and advancing across the plains. That the advance is no more than a few miles has nothing to do with the case. The Germans have not only been driven from a stronghold, but they have been compelled to uncover positions of extraordinary value. The main line of their communications is practically cut. Bruges must be within range of the heavy artillery. And the Ypres salient has been so far deepened to the eastward as to make certain a general German retreat from their northern lines, and probably also from their fortifications to the south. The gains are not only important. They are critical.

At the beginning of the battle, several weeks ago, we were surprised to find that a French army had taken up its position to the north of the British forces and between Dixmude and Bixshoote. After the first few days' fighting, when this French army registered a considerable gain, we heard no more of it, and we are still in doubt as to the cause that led to the transfer of this force to a section of the line that had been hitherto entirely British. But this French force has now struck another blow. While the British were fighting their way northeast to Poelcapelle, the French on their left also advanced, and gained about a mile and a half, and this move was evidently undertaken in order to bring the two armies into alignment. This has not quite been accomplished, since the French are still to the westward of the British, but the advance serves none the less to intensify the pressure upon the German lines to the north, and to increase the danger of envelopment that is rapidly becoming acute. This last battle was fought under the most disadvantageous weather conditions, and that it was fought at all is evidence that the Allied commanders do not intend to allow anything short of the impossible to stand between them and the goal that they now see to be so close. They have certainly resolved that there shall be no pause in the battle until the German lines have been forced into a general retreat, and it now seems improbable that they can be balked.

WE look for more than one cause of the determination with which this extraordinary battle is being fought. That a successful issue would exclude the submarines from Ostend and Zeebrugge is true enough, and this alone would justify the exertions that are being displayed. But the battle is certainly related to the internal conditions of Germany. We know now that there is a constantly grow-

ing opposition to the violent and reckless projects of the Pan-Germans, who are far more concerned for their own caste dominance than for the well-being of the nation. The liberal elements of the Reichstag are in an ugly mood, and even the rather abject socialists are beginning once more to make themselves heard. We know, too, that there has been grave disaffection in the navy, and that there have been many mutinous outbreaks in the army. There is good reason to believe that popular discontent is perilously near the explosion point, and that the scarcity of food is having its inevitable effect in arousing the spirit of suspicion. Now the only hope of the Pan-Germans is in preserving the pretence of victory, or at least of a military deadlock that can afford to wait for the mythical triumph of the submarine. A military reverse that could be neither hidden nor explained would enormously stimulate the peace party, and it would correspondingly weaken the pleas for patience and the promises of ultimate triumph. It would hasten the lethargic movement of the German mind that is already turning itself in bewilderment toward a recognition of actual facts on the battle lines. The military effects of this long succession of victories are startling enough in their tremendous possibilities, but their effects upon the mind of the German public may be even more startling, and it is hardly likely that this consideration has been without weight in the decisions of the Allied commanders. When we couple the events in Flanders with the almost unconcealed dread reflected in the daily speeches of German statesmen, with the obvious disintegration of the German social fabric, we may well believe that we are on the eve of happenings that may be the presage of a speedy peace. And it will not be a Hindenburg peace.



One of the great French 75's, the gun which no German gun-maker can duplicate, at an American training camp.

For these reasons it is interesting to note a bulletin dated from Washington on October 4th, and purporting to be a summary of the opinions of American army officers on the battle that has just been fought. No names are given, since army officers do not usually talk for publication, but there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the bulletin.

Army experts, we are told, have become convinced that the Germans are covering a great withdrawal of their line, while others are of the opinion that the German resistance is animated by the hope that they may possibly be saved from this necessity by the coming of winter. The two opinions are practically the same, so far as the extremity of the German army is concerned. Still other military observers in Washington, we are told, believe that the German army spirit generally is badly shattered. They cite the continual peace cries from Germany, the remarks of prisoners captured by the Allies, the youth of some of these prisoners, and the repeated failures to make any impression upon the British and French lines. This marks a considerable departure from the opinions that were so current a few months ago, and that were so industriously circulated by pro-Germans, to the effect that a deadlock had been established, and that the statesman had better be summoned to do the work that the soldier was evidently unable to do. Of course, there has not been a deadlock at any time, nor anything that even remotely resembled a deadlock. On the contrary, we have seen an uninterrupted waning of the German strength, and an increase in the Allied strength, and for the past year it has been quite certain that the Allies would presently do the very thing that is now transpiring before our eyes.

WHAT may we expect by way of an immediate result from the battle that has just been fought? The answer seems to depend somewhat upon the weather, and also upon those internal conditions in Germany, that may cause an extreme, even a dangerous, reluctance to do the things that ought to be done from the purely military point of view. If bad weather should begin at once it will greatly inconvenience the British in following up the advantage that they have gained. The water is never far below the surface of these Flanders plains, and much rain may make them impassable. But

continuously bad weather is not due for another month, and Sir Douglas Haig has been reducing the intervals between his battles to a minimum. If he can strike again before the weather interferes, and before the Germans begin their backward movement, he will have them in a very tight place. If they were actuated solely by military considerations, they would already have begun their withdrawal, and it is quite likely that they have actually done so. But we know that they are not actuated solely by military considerations. They are in the midst of a political crisis, and they may think it of supreme importance to hide their military predicament from their own people. The Reichstag is in session, and that the Reichstag is suspected of harbouring a rebellious temper is shown by the chancellor's unwillingness to make a public statement as to Belgium and other things. It is quite evident, too, that there are disturbances among the people, whose scanty rations will be much more scanty when the American embargo on neutral countries begins to make itself felt. But on the whole it seems most probable that the Germans will not be able to postpone a withdrawal until wet weather shall come partially to their relief. We may expect to see that withdrawal begin almost at once, if indeed it has not already begun. Every day's delay is an added threat of disaster.

The extent of such a withdrawal is a matter of interesting conjecture, and here again we must face the complication furnished by the German political situation. Some German officers recently taken prisoner say that new defensive works have been prepared that connect Arras in a straight line with Verdun. That is probably true, since it confirms the responsible belief that this was the true Hindenburg line, and that it would have been occupied in the spring but for the rapidity of the pursuit after the withdrawal from the Noyon angle. Verdun lies exactly on the path of a German invasion of France, and of a French invasion of Germany, and it is this fact that gives such critical importance to its position. The German siege of Verdun was an

(Concluded on page 21.)