

# HOW THE WAR LOOKS NOW

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Written Especially for the Canadian Courier

Since the change in our going-to-press schedule Mr. Coryn's Argonaut syndicate copy could not arrive from San Francisco in time for simultaneous publication. A new arrangement has been made for special articles by this student of the war, written exclusively for this paper.—Editor.

*WE may expect very speedily to see an offensive that shall place all its predecessors in the shade. It will come when the work of attrition has proceeded far enough, and when all the German reserves have been brought to the front. A British gain of even a mile may at any moment compel the evacuation of France.*

THE event of the day may be said to be the sudden revival of the war on the Italian frontier, an event that must be full of a profound discouragement for Austria and that comes at the moment of her deepest dejection. At the beginning of the war it will be remembered that Italy moved northward against Trent, and eastward across the Isonzo River against Gorizia and Trieste. The movement north was not actually an offensive. It was a measure of defence. Before Italy could pursue her campaign on the Isonzo it was necessary that she should secure her northern frontier against attack and invasion, and for this reason she advanced toward Trent and spread her troops to the east along the frontier. She was then at liberty to pursue her operations on the Isonzo and southward toward Trieste, operations that were of enormous difficulty and rendered still more arduous by a shortage of ammunition. After a long period of inactivity that followed the capture of Gorizia, Italy resumed her forward southerly movement about two weeks ago and promptly won some successes. The Austrian reply was an attack in the vicinity of Trent, and to a certain extent it was a successful attack, although it was barren of results, since the Italians were easily able to bar the way against an invasion of the country.

The object of the Austrian offensive in the Trentino is obvious enough. It was intended to divert Italian attention from the Isonzo and Trieste, and to lead to a weakening of their lines. In this it evidently failed, since the Italians in their turn have now responded by a great advance movement southward that has broken the Austrian lines over a wide front, and brought the Italian army to the Gulf of Trieste and within twelve miles of Trieste itself. It is a notable victory, not only from its territorial gains, but from the fact that nine thousand prisoners were taken. The Austrians, we are told, were perplexed and dismayed, and gave ground easily, which confirms the already existing conviction that the Austrians are not able to fight successfully in any place or against any enemy without German support. And Germany, just at the present time, has all she can do to support herself, and to postpone the debacle that draws closer day by day. Italy has now performed the service that should have been rendered by Russia. She has struck heavily on her own particular segment of the circle that is strangling the central powers, and the blow that she has directed against Austria cannot fail of its effect in urging the staggering steps of that enfeebled country toward a speedy peace.

THE news from France is almost equally good, although during the week there have been no spectacular advances to record. But the strategy in France does not demand a constant advance. It demands no more than continuous fighting that shall compel the Germans to those attacks that deplete their forces and consume their reserves. We need have no doubt that Sir William Robertson was strictly accurate when he said that the Allies could break through the German lines whenever they wished to, but that the losses would be so great as to dictate a slower and more economical plan. That plan is to attack at every vulnerable point after elaborate preparation, and so to provoke the counter attacks that are so immensely destructive to the assailants. At the present time Germany is losing ten thousand men a day in her incessant counter-attacks upon positions that were taken by her enemies with comparative ease, and she is gaining absolutely nothing in return for her losses. She is throwing her reserves with prodigal extravagance into the battle, and she is reliably said to have brought half a million men from Russia to wither before the British artillery fire. And she has no alternative except a voluntary retreat that might easily be more ruinous than a defeat on the field. She must either stop the British advance or be slowly forced back to the point where a retreat becomes compulsory.

For there is such a point, and it lies immediately behind the position that she is now defending, and that stretches from Drocourt to Queant. The British are steadily gnawing at that line, and if their advance is slow it is not because the line could not be carried by weight of numbers, but because a cautious deliberation is quite as effective and much more economical of lives. None the less we may expect very speedily to see an offensive that shall place all its predecessors in the shade. It will come when the work of attrition has proceeded far enough, and when all the German reserves have been brought to the front. It is not for nothing that Hindenburg is making such desperate efforts to maintain his hold upon the few wretched villages that have suddenly sprung into immortality. A British gain of even a mile may at any moment compel the evacuation of France. The proverbial "last ditch" lies immediately behind the German lines both in the north and the south.

One would suppose that the German people must at last be awakening to the real significance of the war situation, that they must be feeling some sort of consternation at the extent of the deception that has been practised upon them. When the Hindenburg armies fell back between Arras and Soissons it was announced as a great triumph of German strategy. The message of the Emperor could hardly have been more exultant if it had been concerned with the taking of Paris. The military experts vied with one another in their efforts to explain that a retreat was actually an advance, and in depicting the misery of their enemies thus compelled to abandon their fortifications and to advance over devastated ground to the assault of new lines of an impregnable strength. The false note in the chorus of acclamation was audible enough to those outside of Germany, but there was no reason to suppose that it had failed of its effect upon those for whom it was intended. The German has been trained not only in obedience, but in credulity, and if one may judge from the tone of the newspaper press there was very little doubt in the German mind that Hindenburg had indeed "retreated to victory," and that some master stroke of military strategy was about to bring the war to a triumphant conclusion. It was a part of the Hindenburg myth, with its assumption of an irresistible German skill and prowess.

But the present situation must surely have brought disquietude in its train. The German retreat has done no more than transfer the battle to a new area and a less favourable one. During the month that followed the retreat the struggle was waged with a continuous fury, and with an unvarying misfortune for the German arms. Fifty thousand prisoners were taken during that time, and five hundred cannon. The same rate of losses has been maintained ever since. And for this tremendous expenditure there was nothing to show except a constantly waning expectation of success. The hinges that united the old line with the new in the north and the south were assailed alternately by the sledge hammer blows of Nivelle and Haig, and if it cannot

be said that those hinges have actually been burst open, their hold upon the lintels is now wavering and loose. Indeed, so far as the northern end of the line was concerned the Allied success was so distinct that it would have been conclusive but for the rapidity with which the Germans patched up the rupture by their new short line from Drocourt to Queant. This new line is defended by the outpost villages of Fresnoy and Bullecourt. A fierce struggle was waged for the possession of Fresnoy, and at the moment of writing the Germans are still in possession of its outskirts. The attack was then transferred to Bullecourt, and with an unqualified success, for the Germans now admit its evacuation, although they seek to mitigate the misfortune by the rather inconsequent assertion that the British did not occupy the place until twenty-four hours later. It is probable that the attack upon Fresnoy will now be renewed unless the Germans shall first evacuate their positions, which is by no means impossible.

But the struggle has now so far developed that its progress can not be measured by geographical standards alone. Hindenburg knows well that the issues of the war are now being determined around these little French villages that could hardly have been found upon the maps of three years ago. If he shall lose now there is no hope that he can win anywhere or at any time. We no longer hear anything of a German offensive against Italy, or Russia, or towards Calais. Probably these rumours were purely imaginative, but they have been silenced by the magnitude of the present battle. No sacrifice is too great to win it, and we may be sure that Hindenburg has no higher hope than to stay the British advance, and to produce once more the deadlock that shall give time for recuperation and fortification. He is pledging every resource of the German nation to that end, and upon it he is staking his last man and his last gun. He is pouring all of his reserves into the vortex in the one desperate hope that he can hold his own and so avoid a retirement of his whole line and the disappearance of the German armies from French soil.

DOUBTLESS there are other lines that can be used for retarding purposes and for rear-guard actions, but we are not likely to hear any more such absurdities as the "retreat to victory." Unless Hindenburg can check the British advance he will be unmistakably beaten past all explanation or mitigation. He will be on his way to the Belgian frontier, and with an army so shattered and demoralized as to be unreliable. Nowhere is this better realized than in the German high command. In no other way can we account for the prodigal expenditure of reserves, and for an unmistakable readiness to stake everything on the present battle, to win or lose it all.

As has been said, the progress of the struggle can not be measured by geographical measurements alone. A much truer test is the casualty list. If the British can do no more than hold their present places and allow the waves of German assault to dissipate themselves ineffectually, then victory will be with them. For those assaults can not continue indefinitely. The present German losses point indubitably to exhaustion, and this even on the assumption that the Allied losses are as great. Probably they are not nearly as great as a result of the efficiency of the British protecting fire and of a perfection of the artillery service that is now much ahead of the German. The Emperor's message to the Sultan of Turkey speaks of an Allied superiority "in numbers and material," and there can be no doubt that it speaks truly. Germany can not have more than two and a quarter million men on the western front, even after making allowances for those brought from the Russian field, whereas the Allies must have at least three million men on the fighting line and three million more in reserve. Letters from Americans who joined the British army six and eight months ago, and who had received military training on the Mexican border, show that they are still in camp in

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