

WAR FACTS FOR NEW YEAR'S, 1918

THE situation in Russia, the British reverse at Cambrai and the renewal of attacks upon Italy, have combined to produce something that is much like an attack of nerves. To these causes may be added Lloyd George's impressive speech and the utterances of Colonel Repington and other British military experts. Finally we have the chorus of threats from German newspapers and the vague reports of great movements of German troops behind the western front. The German myth still lies heavily upon our minds, and we are still disposed to accept German prowess at a German valuation.

The most potent cause of the general discouragement is undoubtedly the British reverse at Cambrai. That it was a reverse need not be questioned. But neither need it be exaggerated. The British lost at least one-half of the advantage that they gained by their first rush. They were forced back about two miles from their advanced positions in front of Cambrai; they lost Cambrai Brouillon Woods; and they were no longer able to overlook the city and its railroad lines. They lost also about one hundred guns and 6,000 prisoners, and they incurred the moral results of a definite check and a real disappointment. None the less a considerable part of the vaunted Hindenburg Line is now in British hands and is likely to stay there and the German losses were certainly far greater than those of their opponents. Before speaking too glibly of a British reverse it is just as well to understand precisely of what that reverse consists. It means that the British failed to hold all that they had gained. It does not mean that they are less well placed than they were before the attack was brought. They are much better placed but their gains are not so great as at first there was reason to believe. If a feeling of despondency is justified by such an event as this we may wonder if the Germans are subject to similar depression from similar causes. Certainly they would be pleased enough to cancel the successes on both sides and to restore the lines to their original positions, as witness their desperate and unavailing efforts to do so. And what must have been their feelings when they were driven by the French across the Ailette after a resistance that cost them tens of thousands of lives, and when they were driven from the Messines Ridge after three disastrous battles? Since the beginning of the summer the Germans have met with some half a dozen reverses in the western field immeasurably greater than the reverse that they have just inflicted upon the British. It looks almost as though we had been spoiled by successes.

So far as the Italian field is concerned, it is true that the German attacks have been renewed and at a time when we were led to believe that they were over because of a stiffening of the Italian resistance and also because of the arrival of the snows. Now there can be little doubt that the Austrian armies in the Trentino have been reinforced from the Russian front and it is quite certain that the winter season in the Trentino is unusually late. The snows that should have begun three weeks or a month ago are only now showing themselves, and the Teutons have evidently taken advantage of these facts to make another effort to score a victory. But the gains so far recorded to their credit do not constitute a victory. They can hardly be said to presage a victory, nor will they do so unless they are substantially increased. Nothing short of the power to advance southward down the Valley of the Brenta will spell a Teuton victory, and to do this they must capture practically all of the mountain peaks that lie to the east and west of the Brenta Pass.

THE only practicable route for an invading army is by way of the Valley of the Brenta, which passes through the mountains about ten miles to the west of the Piave River. It is the highroad between the Austrian Trentino and northern Italy. In fact there are highroads on both banks of the Brenta River, and there is also a railroad. But the Teuton army can not pass southward through the

GETTING down to common sense, fact-optimism, let us get rid of all the war-bogeys as a New Year procedure. Admit that the British suffered a partial reverse at Cambrai after their great success—all that it means is the British did not carry out the bulldog maxim, "All we have we hold." The British army is better placed than it was before the advance in that region. As to Germans outnumbering the Allies on the west front, let us take the facts of the case. To double her army on the west front is an awful job for the demoralizing German railways. Getting millions of men across Germany with all the heavy guns—think of it? Is Germany not more likely to make an attack on the weak side at Saloniki? She can't break through to Calais. Why butt her last reserves against that stone wall? Italy is holding. German newspapers are canarding as usual.

By **SIDNEY CORYN**

Brenta Valley as long as the valley is dominated by the Italian artillery that has been posted with incredible skill and audacity upon the mountain peaks to the east and the west. These peaks must be wrested from the Italians before an invasion of the Italian plains from the Trentino and through the Valley of the Brenta becomes possible, and it is for the possession of these mountains that the present battles are being waged. A Teuton success here does not necessarily mean that the Teuton armies have made an actual advance toward the Italian plains. It means at most that they have swept away some of the Italian artillery barriers to their descent of the Brenta Valley. But they can not even begin their advance down the Brenta Valley so long as it is covered by the Italian guns from the mountains to the east or to the west. It is erroneous to imagine the Teuton armies as pushing their way steadily forward to the Italian plains with the defensive armies falling back before them. The Teutons have taken the town of Cison, which is on the Brenta River, but they can hardly be said to have begun their advance through the Brenta Pass proper to the south of Cison. Before they can do this they must dispose of the Italian artillery to the east and to the west. If we should hear that the Teutons are within reach of Bassano we may then consider that they have won the battle of the Piave. But the Italians will retreat to the Adige River before them, and if they are able to do this in safety they may still deny a decisive triumph to the Teuton armies. In the meantime we are told that the expected snows are falling in the Trentino, and if this does not imply an actual paralysis of the Teuton efforts it certainly does imply that their blows must lose most of their force, and that they will be in a position of great embarrassment. It is undeniably true that the Teutons may yet succeed in descending the Valley of the Brenta. This will be determined by the fortune of war, but it is certainly not determined yet. And we need not lament as though it had been.

As has been said before, and as is disclosed by a glance at the map, the Italians are defending a formation that may be compared roughly with the two sides of a square. There is first the line of the Piave from the Adriatic to Nervesa, where the Piave enters the mountain territory; and there is the line of the Trentino from Nervesa to Asiago. The second portion is much the more important of the two. If the Italians should lose the mountain lines they must instantly abandon their Piave positions, which would then be outflanked. For this reason the Teuton attacks on the line of the Piave are probably intended more to divert Italian forces from the Trentino than anything else. The Piave, while by no means an ideal defensive position, has none the less the military advantages always associated with a river, and it may be said that these advantages will largely increase as winter helps to swell the volume of water. During the summer the stream of the Piave is di-

vided by sandbanks, but these disappear after rainfalls, and the passage of the river becomes much more difficult. The first Teuton efforts to cross the Piave were checked with heavy losses, and since then it is the Trentino line that has been called on to bear the brunt of the attacks. Now it may be said that nothing has happened on the Italian field during the last two weeks to justify a despondent view of the situation. There must always be anxiety where battles are actually in progress, but at the moment of writing the balance of probable advantage is decidedly with the Italians, and it seems to be increasing.

NOW it is quite possible that Germany is meditating some new and powerful blow in the west in the hope of winning a victory that shall serve as the basis for a peace plea. It is possible, but there is much to sustain a contrary opinion. It is far more likely that she will strike at Saloniki on the German principle of aiming always at the weakest point. It is possible that she has actually four million men now on the western front, as has been stated, but if this is the case she must have begun their transfer a long time ago and before a Russian armistice had been debated. To make such a transfer would be a most formidable task even with the railroads in the best condition, and we know that they are very far from this. It means not only the transfer of the men, but of innumerable guns and of incalculable stores. But there are circumstances that may cause us to doubt the reality of this blow, or at least that it will take the form of an attack upon the established lines. It is certainly suspicious that the whole of the German press with one accord should break out into a chorus of defiant warnings, and the German press prints nothing of a military nature without direct orders. It is not the custom of army commanders vociferously to announce their plans to their enemies. That the German press is thus announcing an overwhelming attack upon the western front at a time when the weather makes an attack difficult and a defence easy seems at least to suggest that no such attack is intended, and that if any move at all is contemplated it will not be of the kind foreshadowed. Germany is hardly likely to repeat her Verdun experiment. She could not regard a drive against Calais with any great cheerfulness, in view of the fact that her last attempt was disastrously beaten, and at a time when her proportionate strength was far greater than it is now. She has just abandoned her positions against the Chemin des Dames and allowed the French to occupy them, enormously to the advantage of the French. There is still the Champagne district, and here there might be a reasonable chance of a German success, although we may dismiss the talk of French depletion and weakness as wholly in defiance of the evidence. But even if we assume that Germany is about to strike against the western line there is still no cause for despondency. Her supposed numerical superiority is not an unprecedented condition. She has been in a numerical superiority many times before, and none the less she has been soundly beaten—on the road to Calais, for example, where her armies were far larger than the British. But whatever she may do will not be an evidence of her confidence, but of her desperation. Nor do I believe that her wildest dreams extend beyond the hope of winning something, somewhere, that shall be efficacious in saving her face in her inevitable peace effort. That peace effort would probably already have been made if she had succeeded in crushing Italy. It was with that in view that she tried to crush Italy. She seems to have failed in Italy, and therefore something must be done elsewhere. In all the essentials of the struggle she is already beaten. She has lost all her colonies, and she has lost the Bagdad Railroad. India and Egypt are beyond her reach, and she is at the end of her reserves. America has taken the field against her, and if necessary could hold that field alone and indefinitely. What victory is within her sight?