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THE  
TRUTH ABOUT KITCHENER



*By the same Author*

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THE STRUGGLE FOR BREAD  
THE GATHERING STORM

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THE BODLEY HEAD

# THE TRUTH ABOUT KITCHENER

BY

VICTOR WALLACE GERMAINS  
("A RIFLEMAN")

TO WHICH IS APPENDED A LETTER FROM  
GENERAL VON LUDENDORFF

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“Render unto Cæsar those things which are Cæsar’s’



TO  
MY DEAR WIFE  
BUT FOR WHOSE HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT  
THIS BOOK COULD NOT HAVE  
BEEN WRITTEN



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## CHAPTER I

### BRITISH MILITARY DOCTRINE IN 1914

**T**HE Pageant of British Military History takes us into many lands and back into remote ages. The Great War, with all its awful sacrifices, with its heart-stirring memories of valour and suffering and death, was but the culmination of a long drawn-out story, a story written in blood and tears by men whose bodies have crumbled into dust, but who have left a heritage behind them, a living tradition which yet speaks to the hearts of Englishmen. Ere we pass on to consider the part played by one of the very greatest of Englishmen at a time of supreme moment to the fortunes of our race, it is surely appropriate to our theme to pause for one instant to turn back a corner in the gaily bedizened scroll which treats of British Deeds of Arms wrought in Days Gone-by, to cast our eyes along a screed bright with the red flashes of war, high coloured with Daring and Heroism and Feats which will endure for Ever, deeply tinted with those baser passions with which the gods, jealous lest Mankind might attain to Eternal Wisdom, have seen fit to impose upon every martial race. In a word ; the Epic of the Conquering Englishman, ruthless and terrible in war, splendid in his virtues and fearful in his passions, arrogant and brutal and brave,

stretching out his hand to conquer Empires and continents, carrying the Bible and the Bayonet from one end of the world to the other, converting the Heathen and exterminating them, covering the seas with his shipping, ransacking the earth for trade and raw materials, encircling the globe with his outposts and trading stations, building an Empire without scheme or plan and almost without conscious endeavour; the creative and dominating impulse of a creative and dominating race. It is a vivid kaleidoscope, a moving chronicle of great and tragic happenings by land and sea, a fitting prelude to the Clash of Arms which forms the subject of this narrative, a Clash of Arms in which the British People engaged upon a most stupendous scale at a time when the fate of the British Empire swayed in the Balance, and in which the martial story of the Anglo-Saxon may be said to have reached its Apogee.

But it has more than a sentimental interest to glance back to the records of those old-time Englishmen ere we come to deal with days still fresh in the public memory, to deal with a mighty figure whose name kindled the hearts of our countrymen amid the shock of war. For it is the measure of Lord Kitchener's genius that he was successful in persuading his countrymen at a most critical moment to put old and time-honoured traditions aside, that he read the Past as a warning for the Future, and that he gave to the war, upon the British side, an impulse unprecedented in our history, an impulse which survived his own death, and which brought eventual victory to the Allied Cause. To appreciate the vastness of this impulse given by Lord Kitchener to the War, to appreciate the difficulties with which he had to contend, something must be said as to what men *thought* as concerned our military policy in the years before the struggle, something must be

said as to the traditions governing and influencing British military policy in the decades preceding 1914. "Sentiments," declared Sir Edward Grey, upon one occasion in the House of Commons, "are facts." Nothing could be more true. The sentiment which, for good or ill, governs the life of a nation, the sentiment for which men will give their lives, or—perhaps an even surer test—for which they will give their money, is a most potent motive-power. The sentiment prevailing among highly placed military coteries and in leading official circles, governed the whole of our preparations for war during the period 1904-1914. It created a situation which Lord Kitchener, when he became Secretary of State for War, had to make the best of, with which he had to deal as best he could.

Going back to the dawn of things there opens before our eyes a series of swiftly moving, brightly-hued pictures. Saxons in tunics and buskins, with bucklers, broadswords, battle-axes and daggers, give place to Norman knights feasting in baronial halls, clattering off to tournaments, the Crusades, or to some local ruffianism, with the stamping of horses' hoofs, the clarion call of trumpets, the gleam of burnished mail, and spear-heads, and with silken banners floating gaily in the breeze. Queer sounding, mediæval military terms come echoing through the ages, "Commutations of Service," "Commissions of Array," "Assizes of Arms." "Commutations of Service" incline us to the belief that our ancestors took no more kindly to compulsory military service than the modern Englishman. Anyhow, they speedily fell into the habit of commuting their feudal military duties into cash payments. "Commissions of Array" were the corollary to this system. They were issued by the king in times of emergency to prominent knights and nobles, authorizing these to raise bodies of

mercenary troops for the king's service. The "Assizes of Arms" were a form of mediæval military stock-taking which lingered on to the days of the Tudors. It was to a certain extent a sort of register of knights and squires and yeomen, liable to service in times of national emergency; a survival of the old Saxon *fyrd*, it was organized by shires in the *shire-levies*. Mediæval England had, however, little conception of national wars. Thinly populated, covered with dense forests, with no roads in the modern sense of the term, and such primitive tracks as existed infested by bands of robbers, with towns few and far between, and these in most cases a collection of mud and wattle houses crowded into narrow lanes and streets; the country-side lived in a state of isolation and ignorance such as the modern man finds it difficult to conceive. To the lonely rustic, the king was a person far less to be feared than the local feudal chieftain, whose castle stood perched upon some commanding height, whose men-at-arms rode swaggering through the valley, whose nod sufficed to drag wife or daughter to be the plaything of lust, to bring fire and sword and all the devilments of the mediæval torture-chamber against the insolent wight who dared to oppose his will. The war of king against king was something far less to be dreaded by the country-side, and which entailed far less misery than the war of petty noble against petty noble, which brought the licence and brutality of unchained passion to every humble home.

It is the growth of kingly power which forms the real introduction to British military history. It was not until the evolution of a strong centralized stable government, capable of maintaining law and order through the length and breadth of the land, and of suppressing the warfare of noble with noble, that there could begin that great expan-

sion of England which culminated in the mighty world-empire of to-day. Such a government we see in the despotism of the Tudors. No doubt despotism is a bad thing. But it is preferable to anarchy. And the Tudors, if lustful and brutal and avaricious, at least insisted that if there was to be pillage and oppression this was to be a prerogative of the king himself, and not of every petty baron. Under the new *régime* the country recovered from the exhaustion due to the Wars of the Roses with amazing speed. Towards the close of Henry VIIIth's long reign, England had become rich and prosperous. The fair and fertile English land, with its mighty forests and wide pastures, with broad navigable streams to make up for the paucity of roads, and to form natural highways to the very heart of the country, with its fisheries as natural training-grounds for seamen, its numerous harbours and the all-pervading influence of the sea, needed but a stable government and the opening up of world trade-routes, to become the home of a race as great in commerce and industry as in arms. The evolution of an English national monarchy, happily coincided with the opening out of new trade-routes to America and the Indies, which gave to Great Britain the favourable geographical position formerly enjoyed by Mediterranean cities such as Venice and Genoa. Slowly, but gathering ever new courage and new hopes and new ambitions, the English race stretched out along the path of imperial destiny. Companies of merchant-adventurers, beruffled and in doublet and hose, equipped clumsily-built sailing-ships, half merchant-vessels, half pirates, which went waddling away to strange seas, and lands which were the homes of legend and romance. The Elizabethan Age saw the impulse fairly launched. London and Bristol were reaching out to a world-commerce, English ships, rotten



with scurvy, overloaded with clumsy cast-iron guns, had braved Spanish galleons and Algerine corsairs, had cast their anchors before Constantinople, had penetrated the secret of the Straits of Magellan, had blundered across the Pacific, and had reached the golden shores of distant Cathay. In the next century the movement continued upon an ever-increasing scale. There was trouble at home. The time-honoured feud between king and barons had broken out anew. During the reign of the Tudors a new nobility had arisen, no more disposed than the barons of Simon de Montfort to tolerate the unchecked despotism of the crown. There ensued the Civil War, followed by the Restoration, but it was not until the Revolution of 1688 that the issue was finally decided. James was deposed, William, a foreigner, was dependent upon the support of the nobles; from this period until the Reform Bill of 1832 the governance of England was, for practical purposes, in the hands of a small clique of great families. It was an aristocratic republic in which the House of Commons limited itself to carrying out the decrees of the House of Lords. Yet the combination of great nobles and great merchants which now ruled England, formed an oligarchy which if venal and unscrupulous and selfish, was yet capable of maintaining its own authority with ruthless energy and zeal, and of waging war by sea and land with patriotism and vigour.

We now reach an age in which the modern history of the British army may truly be said to have begun. The eighteenth century opened with a blaze of glory and Marlborough's victories. Quaintly clad, red-coated soldiery stormed Gibraltar, and swore "horribly in Flanders." The War of the Spanish Succession was the earliest world-war. It spread to America and the Indies. To paraphrase a famous saying applied to a later epoch, black men fought

in Coromandel, and red men scalped one another on the shores of the Hudson. In successive wars the British arms marched from conquest to conquest. English merchants fought with Spain for the Assiento contract, and won the right to sell slaves. They swept the seas with mingled piety and blackguardism, thoughtfully sending out Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* to lonely "factors" in heathen lands, no doubt that it might console them against the prospect of rack and thumbscrew at the caprice of some barbaric potentate. They colonized the West India Isles under the tears and lamentations of thousands and hundreds of thousands of blacks carried away into a cruel and callous slavery. They were hard and coarse men, the products of a hard and coarse age. Under the Elder Pitt we already perceive Britain transformed into a world-empire. She had asserted herself as the chief maritime power, and her army had already undertaken certain traditional functions. There had developed a large permanent regular establishment, loosely organized into battalions of infantry and regiments of cavalry. The men were raised largely by voluntary enlistment, but the press-gang also played a rôle in making up shortages in recruits. In general, the military profession did not rank high. The regular soldier was apt to be a work-shy or ne'er-do-well, whilst often convicted criminals were given the option of joining the army or navy. The conditions of service were not such as to attract the best class of man. Discipline was enforced by brutal floggings, sentences sometimes of hundreds and thousands of lashes. In fact, it is doubtful if all the horrors of American slavery, made familiar by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, can compare with the horrors inflicted upon "free" Englishmen, taking up arms to serve their king, in those days when the empire was a-making. Generally speaking it

may be said that during the eighteenth century there was established the tradition that the British army existed mainly for colonial expeditions and for service in overseas garrisons. When it appeared on the continent of Europe, it was but as a contingent to an allied army. Dettingen and Fontenoy took nothing like the place, in popular imagination, of Plassey and the Heights of Abraham. Although Crécy and Agincourt were memories dear to the English heart, and the English king still styled himself King of France, there was never any suggestion that England could venture single-handed to invade this latter country. Already, it was an accepted theory that England's weapons in a continental war were her ships and her money. Herself immune from invasion, and with the seas open to her shipping, she could always buy allies, and when recruits ran short, she could purchase droves of German serfs, to fight her battles for her. Thus although the *shire-levy* lingered on in the form of a county militia, this was not taken very seriously. Not until the invasion scare of Napoleon's Boulogne Flotilla, and the unexpectedly heavy demands of the Napoleonic wars, did the militia begin to play a prominent part in national defence.

The Napoleonic Wars involved an immense expansion in British military strength. Nevertheless our policy remained true to the tradition that our army should engage mainly in colonial expeditions, and if engaged in Europe should act as a contingent to an allied army. The Peninsular War was entered into under the quite mistaken idea that there existed large and powerful Spanish armies, with whom the British could unite. At Waterloo, it was Napoleon's offensive which precipitated the decisive battle, the British were to have marched side by side with Prussians, Austrians and Russians in a great combined offensive. In general, it

may be said that the Napoleonic Wars saw no conception of concentrating the full power of the British armies for a decisive stroke in the decisive theatre of war. Wellington never had anything like the full man-power of the British Isles behind him, and the forces actually raised were dissipated among a number of objectives, e.g. the Walcheren expedition, and Graham's expedition to Holland.

Passing over the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny, which whilst filled with heroic incidents made no great change in our military policy, we come to the Prussian wars with Austria and France in 1866 and 1870-1, which so profoundly influenced the world down to the very days of the Great War. The swift successive overthrow of two great military empires, by a state which had heretofore played but a secondary part in Europe, shook even the smug self-complacency of Mid-Victorian England. The bloody drama of Gravelotte and Sedan, the disasters of the People's War waged by the French Republic, gave rise to a general feeling of apprehension as to our own military preparedness. There resulted the earliest scheme of Army Reform, the first attempt at the scientific organization of our army for war.

The general features of the Cardwellian System introduced in 1871 are sufficiently well known. The British army had consisted hitherto, exclusive of the Guards, of a very large number of line-battalions, scattered at haphazard all over the Empire, and mostly forming single-battalion regiments, known by numbers reaching back to the dawn of our military history. The men were enlisted for life, there was no Army Reserve, and there was no means of bringing battalions to war strength, or of replacing casualties, save by enlisting new recruits. In 1870, there was passed a Short-Service Act to create an Army Reserve, and in the following year, there was introduced the "linking"

of battalions. During the Peninsular War it had been found necessary to maintain one battalion at home to provide drafts for every battalion in the field. The new system accepted this fact as the basis of our military organization, and battalions were linked in pairs, one being at home and one abroad. Regiments, hitherto without any Territorial title, were now attached to regimental districts. The United Kingdom was divided into sixty-six of these, usually with two regular battalions, one at home and one abroad, and a varying number of militia and volunteer battalions. The militia, it may be said, was a force recruited mainly from casual labourers and men of no settled occupation, and ranked even below the regular army in the Mid-Victorian popular mind. Militiamen did a short recruits' course, and battalions were embodied for a three weeks' annual training. The volunteers were men of a very different stamp, who had responded to the invasion scare of 1859, when an address delivered by the Third Napoleon to his colonels, had been taken to imply a threat to invade England. Militia and volunteers were enlisted only for home defence.

The Cardwellian system, including militia and volunteers in a common scheme of organization, was the earliest attempt to envisage a *national army*. It was a scheme which aroused great opposition. "Linking" broke up cherished regimental traditions. The Abolition of Purchase bore hardly upon officers who had paid more than the regulation price for their commissions. Yet a system of appointing officers which dated back to the days of the "Commissions of Array" was very generally felt to be an anachronism in the days of the armoured steam-warship and of the breech-loader. The War Minister carried his point, and the system then introduced remained the basis of our military organization

down to the outbreak of the Great War. It was a system which had many defects. The battalion serving at home was always a "squeezed lemon" as its best men were being perpetually drafted off abroad. Moreover, short-service meant a greatly increased demand for recruits; the British Army became dependent upon the "hungry hobbledehoy" to fill up its ranks; and the number of "young soldiers" serving with the battalions at home was always unduly large. In 1911, a deserter charged before a London magistrate was found to be fifteen years old, and remanded to the Children's Court. After dropping "young soldiers," battalions required a disproportionately large number of reservists to complete to a war-establishment. This resulted that the Army Reserve was practically absorbed on mobilization, and that no surplus was left for replacing the wastage of war. Further, battalions at home being "squeezed lemons," there remained no force capable of dealing with a sudden emergency, such as a "little war" which did not warrant a general mobilization. This drawback was partially remedied by the formation of a special class of Army Reservist, who undertook to come up for service whenever called upon.

Great as was the influence of the Franco-Prussian War upon British military institutions, it is doubtful if it had anything like the influence upon British military *thought* exercised by the American Civil War. This great struggle, fought by a kindred people, made illustrious by such names as Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson, Grant and Sheridan, and fought largely by hastily raised volunteer levies, was a military pageant of peculiar interest to the thoughtful English soldier. Moltke is reported to have said of this gigantic strife, "there is nothing to be learnt from the conflict of two armed mobs." If true, the remark illustrates a certain psychological bent

characteristic of the German military mind. Chesney, a writer of great power and capacity, early drew attention to the importance of this war from the British standpoint. But it must be put to the credit of the late Col. G. F. R. Henderson, to have really "discovered" the American Civil War to literature. The publication in 1898, of Henderson's *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, was an event almost as epoch-making for the Army as Mahan's *Sea-Power* for the Navy. It was a work written in a simple yet glowing English which lent to a difficult subject the lightness and grace of a fascinating novel, it was a military doctrine presented with such clearness, force and precision that even those totally ignorant of military matters could grasp it. Above all, it laid down, for the first time, the theory that the next great war in which the British Empire found itself involved would witness an unprecedented expansion of our regular armies by bodies of hastily raised volunteers, and that it therefore behoved us to make a most careful study of the mistakes made by the Americans in raising their new armies, so as to ensure that we should not repeat them.

Lord Roberts has related how he read *Stonewall Jackson*, previous to assuming the command in South Africa, and how he was led by reflection upon the strategy pursued by Lee and Jackson to march upon Bloemfontein and Pretoria. Henderson, invited by Lord Roberts to join his staff in the war against the Boers, became Director of Intelligence in an army to which Lord Kitchener was Chief-of-Staff. In the vision and foresight displayed by this latter, years afterward in the Great War, in the scheme for the organization of the New Armies, it is easy to trace the deep influence of Henderson's writings. The shallow optimism which filled both sides at the beginning of the conflict in America, the

incidents of troops marching "time-expired" off the battlefield to the sound of guns, all these were lessons which it is clear that Kitchener had laid to heart. His warning to the Government that, whilst everyone hoped that the war would be short, wars "run unexpected courses" and we must prepare for a long struggle, his insistence upon a scheme of recruiting by which men were made liable for the period of the war, whatever this might be, and for service all over the world, sufficiently indicates the extent to which he had profited by the doctrines laid down by Henderson.

The South African War revealed certain obvious defects in our military organization. The Cardwellian system had territorialized the army, had created a reserve and had linked battalions, but it had not provided for the steady all-the-year-round training of battalions as in the continental armies. Manœuvres were held upon too small a scale, and under conditions which were too unreal to afford real practice in the difficult art of handling great bodies of men. The staff-work of the army was bad. In the battalions, training was much a matter of adjutant *cum* sergeant-major. A time-honoured story tells of a company-commander, who, questioned on manœuvres by a general, "Captain W——, what are you here for?" stuttered out, turning to his N.C.O., "C-c-colour-sergeant, what are we here for?"

Above all things, the small regular army had shown itself quite unable to conduct a campaign of any magnitude to a successful conclusion unless supplemented by new levies. In South Africa, the Colonial Contingents, the C.I.V., Imperial Yeomanry, and Volunteer Companies, all did good service. Nevertheless the numbers produced were obviously insufficient to provide for a great emergency. Various



schemes for the expansion of the regular army in time of war began to be formulated. A Royal Commission under the presidency of the Earl of Elgin reported that, "No military system will be satisfactory which does not contain powers of expansion outside the limits of the regular forces of the Crown, whatever that limit may be." Another Royal Commission, presided over by the Duke of Norfolk, urged that a Home Defence Army should be formed based upon compulsory service.

A committee, of which Lord Esher was chairman, made some unessential changes in army-organization. In general, the lessons from South Africa had a healthy influence upon the training and spirit of the Army. The importance of good shooting was driven home, the equipment was modernized, with the result that the British Army went into the world war, as the only army with a twentieth-century equipment. Moreover, the tendency of the civilian public to despise the soldier and to look upon him as a social pariah, had received a wholesome check in the outburst of patriotic feeling when the nation went mad over Mafeking and Ladysmith. The Army became "respectable" with results beneficial to recruiting.

In the meantime Lord Roberts after ceasing to be Commander-in-Chief had inaugurated a campaign for compulsory service. The disasters and difficulties of the campaign in South Africa had profoundly impressed him with the insufficiency of our military preparations. Since the days of the Boulogne Flotilla, British public opinion has always been sensitive to the threat of invasion, and, whilst the Navy guaranteed protection against any such enterprise upon a great scale, it was admitted to be impossible to prevent small raiding forces from slipping through to our shores. In the event of the regular army being called away to deal with an

emergency elsewhere, such raiding parties, if daringly handled, might do quite a lot of mischief before being destroyed. Although it would seem to have been rather the vision of Russia looming up against India with her millions of men, than fears as to the defence of the United Kingdom, which was at the back of Lord Roberts's campaign, the general nervousness as to invasion gained him a very large measure of support. Leading politicians, however, affected to look upon him as an alarmist. They were unwilling to embark on the dangerous enterprise of endeavouring to persuade the country, in cold blood, to undertake conscription with all its corollaries of loss of liberty and police control, alien to the thought and instinct of a people which for centuries had felt no foot of an invader, and which had given to the world new ideals of civic freedom. Even the Conservative Party, predisposed to sympathy with its views, declined to become officially associated with the National Service League. Nevertheless the controversy aroused by Lord Roberts is illuminating in the light it casts upon the doctrines prevailing in leading War-Office circles, down to the very day upon which Lord Kitchener became Secretary of State for War.

Apart from convinced anti-militarists such as Massingham, the opposition to the proposed measure came mainly from the "Blue Water School." This followed the historical tradition of the British Army, which was that the contribution of Great Britain in a war should be limited to her fleet and financial support rendered to her allies. Defence against invasion was primarily the function of the fleet, and attention was drawn to the offensive power of a naval blockade. So far as concerned the Army, this could act as a small contingent to a continental army or could be engaged in colonial expeditions. It was customary to indulge in

somewhat vague phraseology as to the "mobility" of the British army as compared with continental powers.

There is ample evidence to show that the views of the "Blue Water School" actually dominated at the War Office down to the very outbreak of the war. Nor, upon careful scrutiny of the works published by the National Service League, does it appear that there existed any great difference in principle between them and their opponents. The National Service League did not propose to raise a regular army by means of compulsory service, to operate overseas in time of war. Their proposals were limited to a militia to be raised by compulsory service for home defence. Certain alterations were to be made in the organization of the regular army which would, it was claimed, produce a "striking force" of 270,000 short-service regulars enlisted voluntarily.<sup>1</sup> But there was no conception of an army numbering millions of men to partake in an armed struggle in Europe. Nor was there even a hint that men should be raised by conscription for service overseas. Speaking of the expansion of the regular army under his proposed scheme, Lord Roberts writes: "True it is that unless they [the conscript militiamen] volunteered they would not be available for service abroad."<sup>1</sup>

The agitation for compulsory service led to the publication upon intervention of the Secretary of State for War, Mr., subsequently Lord, Haldane, of *Compulsory Service* by Sir Ian Hamilton. The high position of the author, and his close association with Lord Haldane, lends a peculiar interest to the work. We may take it as representing the "mind" of the reforms introduced some two years earlier into the British Army. Its doctrines are thus worthy of analysis as showing the mental outlook of the men who

<sup>1</sup> *Fallacies and Facts*, by Lord Roberts, p. 160.

fashioned our military organization in the years before the crisis burst upon us. Passing by a great deal of special pleading upon the subject of conscription, a subject the discussion of which was inconvenient to the government of the day, we find the doctrines of *Compulsory Service* to be those of the "Blue Water School." We observe stress laid upon the "long range" of the British regular army as compared with the "short range" of continental armies. We have the customary vague talk as to the mobility conferred by seapower. . . . "Finally they do not actually, personally, know the General Staffs of foreign armies, or realize how hateful to those methodical minds is the idea of the shifting base and incalculable line of communications of a Power in command of the sea."<sup>1</sup> In view of the fact that we never during the Great War succeeded in bringing off anything in the nature of a strategic surprise by means of the assumed mobility conferred by sea-power; in view of the fact that the attempts which we made to do so, usually ended disastrously to ourselves, this phrase is peculiarly illuminating. Not the least interesting feature in *Compulsory Service* is the suggestion for a Third Line to be based upon "latent" conscription. This was to be a paper force similar to the "seemingly dead paper law of 1831 creating the Garde Nationale, which went within an ace of saving France in '70."<sup>2</sup> Coupled with a reference made by Lord Haldane's successor, Colonel Seeley, in the House of Commons to a "short sharp Act" it is clear that an idea of compulsion lurked behind our military organization, but it was compulsion to be applied *after* the outbreak of war, and at a carefully chosen psychological moment. In Sir Ian's own words, "During perhaps two or three months of the South

<sup>1</sup> *Compulsory Service*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

African War, conscription would have been accepted, but I put it to you that the nation would never have swallowed the dose of physic during the preliminary or later phases of the campaign."

It is not clear however whether the conscription to be thus applied was to be for foreign service. On the one hand we are told, "If you wish to count your bayonets by the million, you must make up your mind to retrace the steps of Empire." On the other, there is a reference on the page immediately preceding to ". . . the Empire . . . fighting for bare life. Only drafts, and these only for short-range European purposes, could we reasonably demand from it" [the proposed Third Line]. It is clear that the War Office, even in the case of "the Empire . . . fighting for bare life," did not contemplate the formation of new conscript armies for service overseas. In view of certain criticisms made against Lord Kitchener this is important.

In summarizing the doctrines of *Compulsory Service*, we see the familiar conception of the British regular army as available for service in colonial expeditions or as a contingent to a continental army. Certain arrangements were felt to be necessary in the way of providing semi-trained troops for home defence and to produce drafts. But once we get to the stage of "the Empire . . . fighting for bare life" everything is vagueness and confusion. There is talk of a Third Line, but how this Third Line is to be raised, whether by conscription or by voluntary service, how it is to be organized or provided with trained officers or N.C.O.'s or with arms and equipment of war, is all left to the imagination. We get the impression that the men responsible for our military organization *refused* to look far ahead, that the talk of the "seemingly dead paper law which went within an ace of saving France in '70" is the merest sop to con-

science. How can we imagine a government deliberately setting itself to imitate the follies and disasters of France in one of the greatest catastrophes known to History? The "seemingly dead paper law" brought France to ruin in 1870-1, the refusal of the British government to face its military problem squarely in the years before 1914 brought the British Empire to the brink of irretrievable disaster, cost us the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, and cost us thousands of millions of pounds. When we study the "reforms" introduced by Lord Haldane into the British Army, the narrow and limited outlook animating the Secretary of State for War, and his military advisers, their absence of foresight and of moral courage become very apparent. Almost their first action was to make considerable reductions in the Regular Army. It was purely an electioneering device. The Liberal Party had come into power upon a cry of "bloated armaments," and "retrenchment and reform." Something had to be done to justify it. And yet the international atmosphere was becoming increasingly grave. The Algeciras Conference had cast the shadow of an armed and aggressive Germany all over Europe, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal Premier who had come to office upon this very cry of "Peace, retrenchment, and reform," was forced to the extraordinarily grave measure of authorizing "conversations" between the British and French General Staffs, which dealt with the possibility, we might almost say the probability, of a war with Germany which would find the two countries fighting side by side. Lord Kitchener was once heard to lament that democracy meant so much "eyewash" in public business. When we consider the Liberal Government at a period surcharged with the electric thrill of war, secretly putting out feelers for alliances

with France and Russia, whilst holding up their hands in holy horror over the "bloated armaments" maintained by their predecessors, "bloated armaments" which they were destined themselves altogether to surpass, we get a picture of English Public Life, not exactly attractive. If every nation gets the government which it deserves, let us at least hope that the British nation did not really deserve this sort of thing.

In any case the reforms introduced by Lord Haldane bear very obvious signs of the "conversations" between French and British Staffs already alluded to, and of the general atmosphere of strain. There was a "speeding up" of the processes of mobilization, with the idea of a British contingent to be sent to join the French Army as soon as possible. Provision was made for maintaining this force in the field against losses due to casualties and disease. Lastly, there was to be a home defence army to beat off raids. It was a very limited scheme, a half-hearted attempt to put our military house in order. Small improvements were made here and there, in machinery. But in general it was a reshuffling of the cards. There had existed heretofore a scheme for providing a "striking force" of three army corps, each of three divisions of two brigades, with two cavalry divisions also of two brigades. The grand total was eighteen infantry brigades and four brigades of cavalry. Under the Haldane scheme, the "striking force" became the Expeditionary Force, the three army corps, with nine divisions and eighteen brigades, became six "big" divisions each of *three* brigades, whilst the two cavalry divisions each of two brigades were transformed into one cavalry division of *four* brigades. But the only solid advantage brought about, by the whole business of dealing out new names to old units, was the improvement and quickening up of the

time-table for mobilization. The same tendency to give new names to old units is to be observed all through the Haldane scheme. The Cardwellian system remained the bed-rock of our organization. But the Militia were made liable for service all over the world in time of war, and became an integral part of the Regular Army. It was renamed, the Special Reserve, and reorganized into seventy-four depot battalions, to form feeders to each pair of line battalions in event of a general mobilization, and twenty-seven battalions known as the extra-Special Reserve, for service upon lines of communications.<sup>1</sup> The new home defence army, known as the Territorial Force, was formed by taking the Volunteers and Imperial Yeomanry, which had a strength of about 320,000 men, and organizing them into fourteen Territorial divisions, similar to those of the Regular Army. If it was undoubtedly a step in advance to replace the unwieldy, inchoate assemblage of Volunteer Battalions, by a force organized upon lines analogous to the Regular Army, it must not be forgotten that the organization, down to the outbreak of the war, existed mainly upon paper. The training of the Territorials was limited to an hour's drill at odd moments, and an annual training of from eight to fifteen days. Volunteer battalions of fortress artillery were converted into Territorial field and horse batteries, but they were deficient not only in training but in horses and harness, and were armed with an old field-gun discarded by the Regular Army. The long Lee-Metford rifle served out to Territorial infantry, was also an obsolescent weapon, whilst a large proportion of the rank and file were youths under the age limit for foreign service, even had

<sup>1</sup> Special Reservists were enlisted for six years. They did six months' training on enlistment, followed by a short annual training. They were meant for providing drafts in event of war. Battalions had an establishment of 500 men.



they been willing to undertake this liability. The action of the government, subsequently, in keeping back two out of our six regular divisions, for purposes of home defence, sufficiently indicates the lively sense which prevailed in well-informed quarters, as to the deficiencies of the Territorial Force. This, moreover, whilst it expanded rapidly after the outbreak of the war, never came anywhere near to reaching its establishment in time of peace.

The influence of the "conversations" between the French and British General Staffs, and the extent to which the possibility of a war with Germany governed our military preparations, can be seen from a memorandum written by Mr. Winston Churchill on August 13th, 1911, and, so he informs us, reprinted by him, September 2nd, 1914.<sup>1</sup> In this Lord Kitchener is quoted as suggesting that six divisions might be sent from India, which with six divisions comprising the Expeditionary Force, and a seventh division to be formed from the Mediterranean garrisons and from South Africa, a grand total of 290,000 men, could, according to Mr. Churchill, be concentrated in France, supporting the French left within forty days. Like most of Mr. Churchill's schemes, the thing looked better on paper than it worked out in practice. When during the war a similar concentration was actually attempted, it required six months to complete the process instead of forty days. Moreover, we note a curious contradiction between Mr. Churchill's statements with regard to this memorandum and statements made subsequently in his book. Lord Kitchener, for instance, is here quoted as saying that if two native units were taken away for every British unit, white troops could be taken from India, and as suggesting that six divisions could be thus set free. From this it would appear that the

<sup>1</sup> *The World Crisis*, Vol. I, p. 60.

future War Minister had conceived the idea of taking European troops from India long before the war. Yet later on, Mr. Churchill gives quite a different account of how the idea of taking the white troops from India arose, informing us that it came from a casual suggestion from his military staff-officer that a certain number of regular *batteries* should be taken from India and Territorial *batteries* sent out in exchange. Kitchener is said to have seized upon the idea with alacrity, but to have developed it upon a scale never dreamt of by its author. May one suggest that the Secretary of State had evidently had the idea at the back of his mind long before the military staff-officer broached the subject? Passing this, however, we observe from the tone of the memorandum that it was practically taken for granted that Germany in the event of war between herself and France would endeavour to force her passage through Belgium, and that this would lead to British participation in the war. Mr. Winston Churchill was a very important member of the Government, and at a time of international crisis—it was the time of the Agadir incident—was scarcely writing memoranda of this description as an academic exercise. We find it proposed to send to the continent of Europe, an Expeditionary force, of at least four, and ultimately, perhaps, even thirteen divisions, yet there seems to have existed no carefully thought-out scheme by which this great force, great in comparison with our military resources at that time, was to be furnished with drafts or expanded by new units. Indeed, nothing can be more extraordinary, nothing can illustrate more strikingly the general muddle-headedness of the Haldane scheme, than the fact that whereas, during the Peninsular War, it had been recognized as necessary to maintain one battalion at home for every battalion abroad, whereas this policy had been accepted

by Lord Cardwell as the basis of the *peace* organization of our army, Lord Haldane and his military advisers proposed during time of *war* to maintain one Special Reserve battalion, with an establishment of 500 *men*, to every pair of line battalions abroad, these having an establishment of 1000 *men* a-piece, i.e. the equivalent of one battalion at home to *four* abroad. In view of the ridiculous assertion sometimes made that Lord Kitchener introduced "chaos" into the War Office by ignoring the "carefully devised" scheme left behind by Lord Haldane, this fact seems to be worthy of comment. But for the system introduced by the new Secretary of State, the situation of the regular army with regard to drafts would have been lamentable after the first two months of the war.

Mr. Churchill in the memorandum already quoted speaks of a compulsory levy of 500,000 men to be formed upon the *cadres* of the Territorial divisions. We thus meet again with the idea of "latent" compulsion. Right Honourable Gentlemen, whilst publicly talking of "bolting and barring the door against conscription," seem in private to have been prone to express other views. But, in any case, the question as to how far a force raised purely for home defence could be relied upon for drafting abroad is somewhat debatable. In his memorandum, Mr. Churchill rather runs away from this particular point. "The question of sending any part of the compulsory levy, *by compulsion* to the Continent would not arise until after this force [the existing Territorial Force] had been trained."

The weakest part of the Haldane "reforms" was just this particular point, that they provided no means for the steady and systematic expansion of the *offensive* power of our armies. The Territorial scheme provided a defensive framework capable at the end of six months or so of dealing

satisfactorily with the defensive needs of the United Kingdom. But there the thing ended. Once the totally inadequate arrangements made for drafting, e.g. the Special Reserve, had been exhausted, there existed no machinery for raising drafts for the front. Even under the tremendous impulse to recruiting given by Lord Kitchener, the Territorials responded very unwillingly to calls for drafting.

It seems surprising in fact, in the light of the experience of the war, that it should never have been realized that the road to salvation, in our military problem, lay less along the line of *defensive* expansion, i.e. the development of the principle of the Territorial Force, than in *offensive* expansion, i.e. the development of the principle of the Special Reserve. The Special Reserve was in itself a step in the right direction. But it did not go far enough. Whatever may be said as to the failure of the Government, in view of the serious nature of the international situation, to introduce a policy of compulsory service—and it may be admitted that at the time such a measure was not “practical” politics—there can be no excuse for the refusal to demand adequate sums for purposes of national defence. The nation, whatever may have been its attitude to a revolutionary proposal for compulsory service, would certainly not have grudged money if told by the government that special measures were necessary to deal with a grave crisis. The Liberal government was peculiarly favourably circumstanced to make such a demand, as it need fear no opposition from the Conservatives. The government might well have insisted that the Territorial Force should have been rearmed in time of peace with efficient rifles and modern artillery. As matters were, this force—Lord Haldane’s pet creation—actually went into the war with its obsolescent guns and rifles, and the Master-General’s Department was

left in such a state of disorganization that under the scheme of munitions supply accepted as "normal," it would have required *three years* to rearm Territorial divisions with the latest types of weapons of war. Above all things, even if the establishments of the Special Reserve battalions could not have been increased in time of peace, it seems surprising that there should never have occurred to Lord Haldane, nor to his military advisers, the simple device of earmarking a small percentage of selected Army Reservists or Special Reservists to form *cadres* upon which to build new regular battalions in time of war! Precedents were not lacking for such an organization. Lord Dundonald in organizing the Canadian Militia years previously had adopted the principle that each unit upon mobilization should leave behind it a *cadre* upon which could be formed a new unit. We have seen Mr. Winston Churchill, in his memorandum, suggesting a compulsory levy of 500,000 men to be formed on the *cadres* of the Territorial divisions. It seems strange that until Lord Kitchener appeared on the scene it should have occurred to no one that new divisions could be formed upon *cadres* left behind by the regular divisions of the Expeditionary Force. Later on we shall see Lord Kitchener hastily snatching two or three officers and N.C.O.'s from each regular battalion to form a nucleus for his new troops, and incurring a bitter and foolish opposition for doing so. How much better and more easily the system could have been worked out, had it formed part of an army organization drawn up in time of peace! By sacrificing fifty to a hundred selected men per battalion, *cadres* could have been provided for the whole of the first four New Armies subsequently formed by Lord Kitchener. These armies could have existed as skeletons to be clothed with flesh and blood upon the outbreak of war. The machinery for expansion which

had to be improvised piece by piece amid all the confusion of the most titanic conflict known to man, would have existed in time of peace and would have begun to function smoothly and easily from the very first days of the war. It is doubtful if such a scheme would have meant a penny added to our army estimates. All that would have been necessary would have been that reservists, who were in any case receiving reserve-pay, should be detailed to take over a special set of duties upon mobilization. It would, of course, have meant an enormous step in advance had mobilization stores for these new units, supplies of uniforms, boots, rifles, guns, tents, etc., been kept to be served out to the men as soon as enlisted. But had the government been unwilling to face the very large expenditure which would have been necessary contracts could have been drawn up and kept in the War Office, signed and sealed in readiness to be given out upon declaration of war. The work of expansion would then have been enormously simplified. There would have been order and system where so much had to be left to improvisation and chance.

If it be asked how it came about that neither Lord Haldane nor his military advisers saw these things, the answer must be made that it was because they were lacking in vision. It was because they fundamentally misconceived the true nature of the task which would fall to the British Army in event of a great European war. The problem of Belgium was seen clearly enough. "X's" article in the *Fortnightly Review* on "The German Plan of Campaign against France" left little to be desired in force and clearness based upon the cool and scientific summing up of evidence. On the other hand the British General Staff had allowed themselves to be hypnotized to a dangerous extent by the vision of the Russian masses pouring into Germany. Lord

French, in 1914 is candid upon this point “. . . in depending upon our Eastern Allies to the extent that we subsequently did, we showed as limited a mental prevision in the ‘political’ as we did in the ‘military’ outlook.” The passage quoted follows one in which he writes, “At this time we never had the faintest idea of the actual political situation in Russia.” The author is dealing here with the opening phases of the war. Yet the optimistic calculations based in those days upon Russia would scarcely have been accepted in quite such an open-hearted fashion, had there not existed a certain pre-war basis of assumption with regard to that country, in British army circles, supposed to speak with authority. Lord French, who as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in France, during the critical Autumn months of 1914, was pinning all his faith to the mighty Russian armies, rolling down upon Germany with the irresistible onward sweep of a crimson tide of war, was the very man who as Chief of the Imperial General Staff had been charged with the organization of our army for war, and the drawing up of schemes for military operations. The confessions quoted from “1914” cast a shining light upon the views with regard to our military problem which actually held the field in British General Staff circles before the war.

It was very generally assumed that the Russian mobilization would be slow <sup>1</sup> and that Germany would feel justified in concentrating almost the whole of her armies, in the effort to beat France to her knees, before Russia got fairly into action. But the problem, under the *régimes* of Lord Haldane, Colonel Seeley, and Sir John French, was regarded as essentially one of bolstering up France against a sudden

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Sir Henry Wilson's views quoted by Churchill, *The World Crisis*, Vol. I, p. 58.

overwhelming German onset. Let this onset once be stayed, let the Germans once find themselves held up in France whilst the Muscovite millions came pouring into Germany, then it was believed, the Teutonic invaders would be forced to call back troops to defend their own country, and would ultimately be crushed between French and Russians as between hammer and anvil. An estimate prepared by the British General Staff in 1911, the time of the crisis over Agadir, gave the strength of the German armies upon all fronts as 110 divisions. In reality there were mobilized in 1914, including a large number of *Landwehr* brigades, and reckoning two of these as equal to a division, a grand total of 98 divisions. The same estimate assumed that the Germans would leave a score of their supposed 110 divisions to act against the Russians, thus leaving 90 available for the invasion of France and Belgium. The French were credited with a mobilized strength of 85 divisions, which with 6 British and 6 Belgian, would give to the allied armies not merely equality but a slight superiority over the Germans. In reality, the Germans, in 1914, left not 20 but only 12 divisions to guard their Russian frontier, and the invasion of France and Belgium was undertaken with the equivalent of 86 divisions.<sup>1</sup> The French instead of 85 divisions mobilized 60½, to which were subsequently added 2 divisions from Algeria and some Territorial formations. In view of the statements so often put forward that Germany sprang a "surprise" upon the *Entente* by producing reserve troops, so to speak from up her sleeve, it is of interest to note that she actually mobilized a smaller number of divisions than she had been credited with in our own staff estimates. The greatest mistake made by our staff was not

<sup>1</sup> Official History of the War: Military Operations. Appendices 6 and 3.



with Germany, the enemy, but with France, the friend! This latter power, instead of 85 divisions was only able actually to mobilize 60½. A miscalculation to the extent of nearly 25 divisions, in the case of a friendly and allied state, appears most extraordinary. Had the British Staff estimate proved to be sound we should have mobilized 97 British, French, and Belgian divisions against 86 German. As matters turned out we mobilized a total of 70½, during the first weeks of the war.

The close and cordial "conversations" between the French and British General Staffs would seem to have led, on our side, to a tendency to overestimate the numerical strength and striking power of the French army. On the numbers estimated, however, 97 British and allied divisions on the West Front against a possible 90 German, it may have seemed a fair and reasonable enough standpoint that the allies would be able to hold up, and even decisively to defeat, a somewhat inferior German force. It must be remembered that upon the basis taken the strategic advantages of the situation would have been with the allies. The eastern frontier of France was covered by a chain of great fortresses, and a German deployment through Belgium, apart from the political reactions this would entail, would mean, from the military standpoint, a flank march in the face of a powerful and aggressive enemy. In any case the Germans, locked up in the West, would have had nothing to spare to cover their rear. The Austro-Hungarian Army was known to be in bad condition. It had a long tradition of defeat behind it, was torn by internal dissensions, and deficient in equipment. The maximum strength which it could place upon the East Front was estimated at 40 divisions. The Russian Army, however, if slow to mobilize, was credited with no less than thrice this number. In reality, as we know, the Russians

mobilized with a speed surprising to friend and foe. They came pouring into East Prussia at the very moment when the Germans were in full march upon Paris, dreaming of a second Sedan. At the very eve of the Battle of the Marne, two German corps had to be detached, to deal with the Russian invaders. The bloody battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes swept the Russians reeling back, but the mischief had been done. The Battle of the Marne had brought the German armies to a standstill.

It is curious to note that the British General Staff estimate blunders more in respect to our friends than to our enemies. The overestimate of the French armies has been noted. The overestimate in the time required by the Russians to mobilize is equally significant. In any case, the British General Staff was far from anticipating that Great Britain would be called upon to send armies of millions of men across the Channel, to take part in a long drawn-out war. Mr. Winston Churchill, a leading politician and an influential minister, who was, moreover, in close association with Lord Haldane and the Imperial General Staff, writes :

“The fundamental uncertainty fluctuating from year to year . . . whether the great war would ever come or not, had always been in strong contrast to the very definite and precise opinions of military men about what would happen if it did. Almost all professional opinion was agreed that the struggle would be short, and that the first few weeks would be decisive.”

With all the loose talk about a Third Line and “latent” conscription, neither Lord Haldane nor his military advisers set themselves in earnest to tackle the problem of a National Army, simply because the soldiers who were then responsible for our military policy were firmly convinced that the war, when it did come, would be over before any proposed new

National Army would have time to get into working order. It was very generally held in military quarters, looked upon by the government of the day as authoritative, that the *crisis* of the future war would occur within the first two or three weeks, whilst Germany was endeavouring to overwhelm France before Russia completed mobilizing. In the opinion of the Imperial General Staff, troops who were not available to take part in the fighting of this period, the crisis of the war, might almost as well not be there at all. When later in our story we find Sir John French bitterly reproaching Lord Kitchener with keeping back stores and instructors to form new armies which would not be ready till the war was over, he was only giving utterance to views very generally held by soldiers before the war, views which were shared by men such as Robertson and Wilson. Lord Haldane's 'Territorial scheme was meant to form a home defence army capable of beating off raids, not to form the foundations of a National Army for service overseas.

So far as they *could* see, Lord Haldane and the soldiers about him saw clearly enough, the trouble was that they could not see *far* enough. There is the difference, between the reforms introduced under the ægis of Lord Haldane and the scheme introduced by Lord Kitchener, which lies between "ability" and "genius." The Haldane reforms effected an improvement in the machinery of mobilization, which allowed a small expeditionary force to be swiftly mobilized and rapidly embarked. They provided, upon a very limited scale, for the upkeep of the expeditionary force once landed, by means of drafts from the Special Reserve. They provided, further, for the defence of the United Kingdom against raids. But there the thing ended. The Russian "Steam-Roller," coming slowly into action but with irresistible force, was to crush everything

in Germany before it. That seems to have been the theory. At any rate, *offensive* expansion, if provided for at all, was to come from the limitless reservoirs of man-power of the Czar's dominions. The views of our General Staff, whilst sound enough so far as they went, failed, in point of fact, to credit Germany with any powers of expansion. Whilst the number of divisions which could be placed in the field by the latter country, at the outset of a war, was rather overestimated than otherwise, it does not seem in the least to have been realized that Germany, in view of her greater population, was maintaining a far smaller proportion of active and reserve units than France, and that, if put to fight for her life, she would be capable of doubling, within six months or so, the number of divisions with which she had originally taken the field. Lord Kitchener formed a wiser estimate. Writing in 1911 he said that it was "puerile" to suppose that, "in a war between France and Germany the decisive battles would be fought in the first fortnight of the outbreak of hostilities, or that the presence of our six divisions in the field at the crucial point, and at the earliest possible moment, was the essential element of success." He went on to say that the war would be ended and victory achieved by the "last million" of men that Great Britain could throw into the scale. There is here opened out, for the first time, the immense gulf, in scope and outlook, between the military problem as conceived by Lord Kitchener and the problem as conceived by the Imperial General Staff. But, unhappily, it was not until the crisis was actually upon us that the man who had foreseen and justly weighed the full magnitude of the conflict at hand, was afforded the opportunity of making his voice heard in the councils of Empire. It will never be known exactly how much, in blood and treasure, the refusal of the

British government to call Lord Kitchener to the War Office in 1911 was destined to cost the British People. The Agadir crisis had brought us to the verge of war with Germany. The Writing on the Wall was plainly visible for all men to read. Yet Lord Kitchener, the man subsequently seized upon amid unanimous acclaim, as the only soldier capable of solving our military problem, was not as much as invited to state his views in a memorandum to the Committee of Imperial Defence. The views quoted are taken from private letters. In the official documents of those days we find civilians, such as Mr. Winston Churchill, Lord Haldane, and Lords Tom and Dick and Harry, laying down the law upon military policy, advocating this or that scheme in varying measure fantastic and absurd. But the one man who really understood the problem was kept carefully out of the way, and ignored. So far as the soldiers at the War Office were concerned, they were blind men leading the blind, gold-bedizened Satellites revolving around the civilian Secretary of State for War. Even when Lord Kitchener had become Chief in place of Mr. Asquith, it was long before men such as Wilson, Robertson and French, were prepared to accept his views as to the duration and general conduct of the war.<sup>1</sup>

In summing up, it may be said that the outbreak of the war found the British Imperial General Staff as the proud possessors of a Doctrine. It was a doctrine to the effect that a great European War, if it ever happened, would be over in three or four months, and that the decisive battles

<sup>1</sup> Sir Archibald Murray, having been shown by General von Donop, the scheme for the organization of the new armies, is said to have exclaimed, "But you don't think the war will last as long as *that*, do you?" It may be mentioned that after the Curragh officers' mutiny, Mr. Asquith replaced Colonel Seeley as Secretary of State for War.

would be fought within the first fourteen days or so of the opening of hostilities. Any military help to be given to France must therefore be given *at once* so as to partake in this the decisive phase. Plans were drawn up to enable a British Expeditionary Force of from four to six divisions to be rushed to France. The Special Reserve was organized to provide drafts, and a small proportion of troops for lines of communications. The Territorial Force was to provide for home defence. *No suggestion had ever been put forward by any responsible authority that units of this force should be sent for service overseas.* There existed no scheme for the expansion of the regular army in time of war upon any large scale. There was equally lacking any scheme for the expansion of the Territorial Force. Measures of preparation which could quite easily have been taken by the government of the day, without any revolutionary changes in military policy, i.e. the provision of mobilization stores, and of reserve supplies of guns, rifles, uniforms, etc., for the purpose of equipping new units, had been neglected. Despite the *apologia* published by British Ministers, it can scarcely be maintained that the catastrophe burst upon us unheralded and unforeseen. "Conversations" between French and British staff-officers carried on secretly but with the full knowledge and approval of the British government, secret negotiations with Italy to detach her from the Teutonic Alliance, all speak of an atmosphere heavily charged with war. Not merely the Agadir Incident, but the Balkan War had set every chancellery in Europe on tenter-hooks with anxiety, had set every War Office to overhauling its military harness in anticipation of the trial of strength to come. So grave was the situation felt to be, that France passed a law to reintroduce the Three Years' period of military service, Germany, Russia and the Austro-

Hungarian Empire proposed far-reaching increases in their armies. But the policy of Great Britain continued to be feeble, vacillating and cowardly. Once war had been declared, it may be conceded that the Asquith Ministry displayed remarkable energy and zeal. But in time of peace they pursued a policy baffling to friend and foe. There is ample proof that the entry of Great Britain into the war filled the German government not only with fury but with surprise. It is practically certain that a firm declaration on the part of Great Britain, that she would regard the invasion of Belgium by Germany as a *casus belli*, given in time of peace, would have kept the Teutonic power back from this disastrous measure. But nobody seems to have quite known what England was going to do. France and Russia, sending frantic telegrams to urge British support, would not appear to have been confident that such support would be actually tendered. As we now know, moreover, up to the very last moment, the issue as to whether Great Britain would join in the war or not hung in the balance. There was an absence of clear-cut policy about the attitude of the British government, a lack of frankness as of firmness. The truth seems to be that there was an "inner" Cabinet, full of care for the military and political dangers ahead, but that this "inner" Cabinet, did not impart its policy to the Cabinet as a whole, and shrank from anything likely to arouse public comment and criticism. The result was that the crisis, when it came, found us unprepared. There was a very general absence of "clear-thinking" with regard to schemes of military operation, an entire lack of co-ordination between the Admiralty and the War Office. When the Navy had cause to fear a raid, it never occurred to Admirals to inform the local military authorities, and to "alarm" these. At the time of the Dardanelles enterprise, a very important report,

concerning such a project, drawn up at the time of the Akaba Crisis, was found to have been mislaid. Lord Kitchener accomplished an amazing feat in improvising four new regular divisions by taking white troops from India. When the troops had been brought across the seas, however, it was found that the Imperial General Staff had failed in time of peace to insist upon reserves of mobilization stores upon a sufficient scale to equip these new troops. Thus there resulted delays of many months before they could be sent to the front. Lord Haldane's policy resulted in our tiny Expeditionary Force going into action reasonably well-equipped, but it left nothing behind it. The doctrine prevailed of a short sharp war in which reserves upon a large scale would not and could not be utilized. Thus when Lord Kitchener came to the War Office there awaited him the most stupendous task which ever a man has had to face in modern times. He was to transform an untrained and unprepared people into one of the greatest military powers ever known to history. He was to conjure up rifles, guns, equipment, and all the machinery of war, as if by the stroke of a magician's wand. He was to create *cadres* of officers and N.C.O.'s, and to raise millions of armed men, with none of the recognized machinery of war to help him. He was to lead the British People along a new and perilous path to victory; to cry check! to the greatest military power which the world had ever seen; to meet this power in the full stride of her victorious onslaught and to throw her legions back; to rally the whole strength of the British Empire, roused into a desperate impulse of self-defence, into one grand concerted effort; to labour amid disaster and calumny, patiently forging the New Armies into the hardened steel of war, destined to carve new names and new glories into the bloodstained battle-roll of the Anglo-Saxon.



## CHAPTER II

### LORD KITCHENER COMES TO THE WAR OFFICE

**L**ORD KITCHENER received his formal appointment as Secretary of State for War, August 6th, 1914. Mr. Asquith has placed upon record that the new Chief accepted the responsible post of supreme military authority only with very great reluctance and from a sense of duty. He had no illusions as to what lay before him. "The thorough preparedness of Germany, due to her strenuous efforts sustained at high pressure for some forty years, has issued in a military organization as complex in character as it is perfect in machinery. Never before has any nation been so elaborately organized for imposing her will upon the other nations of the world; and her vast resources of military strength are wielded by an autocracy which is peculiarly adapted for the conduct of war." The words are taken from a speech delivered nearly a year subsequently, but there is plenty of evidence to show that they expressed views arrived at after years of deep meditation in time of peace, and which governed Lord Kitchener's policy from the very first days of taking over the reins of office. There is a reminiscence of Wellington in the simple yet majestic phraseology.

The new Secretary of State for War had an immense

practical experience in the work of organizing and training troops. As a young man he had served as a volunteer with the French army in the war of 1870-1, he had visited Turkey during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8, and had published papers on military and geographical subjects in *Blackwood's Magazine* and elsewhere. Joining the Egyptian army at a time when it was a more or less improvised force, he had ultimately risen to command, and as Sirdar had perfected its organization to such an extent that it had been capable of undertaking the conquest of the Soudan. During the South African War, he had been appointed first as Chief-of-Staff to Lord Roberts, and subsequently as Commander-in-Chief upon Lord Roberts's homecoming. In both capacities he had gained experience in handling great bodies of men against an elusive and mobile foe exceptionally well-trained in the use of the rifle. As Commander-in-Chief in India, following the war against the Boers, there had devolved upon him the task of organizing the Anglo-Indian army for the contingency of a war with Russia. This task he had achieved in a most brilliant fashion. From an inchoate mass of battalions, squadrons and batteries, irregularly distributed among the armies of the three "Presidencies," he evolved a homogeneous army organized into nine field divisions and six cavalry brigades. It is a fact not sufficiently appreciated that it was the Kitchener reforms in India which formed the model for the "Haldane" reforms subsequently introduced into the British army at home. The Kitchener "big" division with its three brigades was taken over "lock, stock and barrel" as the formation for regular and territorial divisions alike. In view of this it may be of interest, as showing the sort of stuff which often finds its way into the Press as "military criticism," that *The Times* Military Corre-

spondent wrote, "Lord K. knew nothing of modern military organization." <sup>1</sup>

The Russo-Japanese War, occurring whilst Lord Kitchener was Commander-in-Chief in India, was of peculiar interest to British military circles there. Japan was our Ally, there was a time when it seemed by no means unlikely that we should be drawn into the struggle; Russia had for years been looked upon as The Enemy, and her progress in Asia regarded with suspicion. Officers from the Indian Army were attached to the Japanese armies, and we may well imagine the interest with which their reports were studied by Kitchener. Certainly in the speeches delivered at this time by the future Secretary of State for War we not only get a very just appreciation of the conditions of modern warfare but we often find attention drawn to the very matters in which the regular troops, trained in England under the influence of other leaders, proved to be markedly inferior to the enemy when put to the test of war. For instance: "The tactical use of the machine-gun is not studied. Commanding officers sometimes seem to forget that they have such weapons. . . . The . . . fact of the case is that it is a very powerful weapon, but its power entirely depends upon the way it is handled. . . ."

Lord Kitchener's reluctance to come to the War Office may well have been due to the fact that his relations with this august institution had never been cordial. Like most soldiers in the field he had come to regard it as the home of general incapacity. It had afforded no measure of genuine

<sup>1</sup> Repington, *The First World War*, Vol. I, p. 43. For sheer ignorance and arrogance the phrase has never been surpassed. The author had obviously never troubled to read Lord Kitchener's Memorandum upon *The Organization and Training of the Army in India*, although this was reprinted by order of the House of Commons, June 8th, 1904. He could have learnt quite a lot from it.

support in his fight with Lord Curzon over the question of Dual Control in India, and this fight, of such immense significance to the British Empire, had been won upon his threat of resignation. In his Minute on the Dual Control of the Indian Army, there creep in here and there phrases which cast a light upon his views on the state of affairs existing at home :

“ Here, as in England, it is owing to the defects in the higher administration of the Army that essentials have been disregarded and military progress and efficiency have not kept pace with the times.”

And again : “ If the military problem in India were only to safeguard the country against the states whose frontiers are now conterminous with her own . . . I should not have raised this very thorny question. . . . Greater issues are, however, now at stake. . . . I feel it is my imperative duty to state my conviction that the present system is faulty, inefficient and incapable of the expansion necessary for a great war in which the armed might of the Empire would be engaged in a life and death struggle.”

Neither the War Office nor the Government at home had shown in time of peace any desire to take Lord Kitchener into their confidence concerning their plans for war, nor had they troubled to inquire his views as to the military problems of the British Empire. It seems an extraordinary thing that this great soldier whom the country unanimously seized upon as the right man to hold supreme military authority in time of war should have been held carefully remote from any participation in the work of military preparation until the crisis was actually upon us. Upon the expiration of his term of office as Commander-in-Chief in India, the Government would seem to have deliberately “ made ” jobs to keep him out of the country. He

was offered the ridiculous Mediterranean Command, a handful of battalions scattered among islands and fortresses, and upon his refusal to accept this actually spent a time unemployed at home, during which he became a Director of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway. During this time, save when in command of troops at the Coronation of King George, a more or less ornamental function, he would not seem to have been given any special opportunity to familiarize himself with War Office administration or with the schemes drawn up by the Imperial General Staff. In regard to this latter body, it may have been no great loss, based as were their schemes upon fundamental misconceptions with regard to the enemy's strength. But lack of familiarity with War Office routine undoubtedly hampered Kitchener in the trying times to come. It was a lack of familiarity for which he cannot fairly be held responsible. Although the Agadir incident brought us to the verge of war with Germany, Kitchener was not, as might have been imagined, placed in a responsible position at the War Office with power to organize the military forces of the country with an eye to efficiency in war. On the contrary he was shipped off to Egypt to fill a civil post as Consul-General. The fact is that neither the Government nor the soldiers at Whitehall desired to have Kitchener any nearer than they could help. He had the reputation of being an organizer of ruthless efficiency and of unbending sternness. Politicians remembered his passage-of-arms with Lord Curzon, which had ended disastrously to the latter, they feared that he would insist upon a policy of drastic and sweeping reforms, and that he might raise the question of compulsory service, the discussion of which would have been distasteful to them. Generals feared to come under a superior who was no respecter of persons, and who demanded

whole-hearted service. Every one who had established interests in the existing system feared a radical and remorseless uprooting of historic sinecures, a reshuffling of the cards of office and power; Kitchener's ruthless methods in South Africa had left many a heart-burning behind them, "Stellenbosch" was still a word of evil memory.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, we get the curious paradox that the very man who was to assume the supreme executive authority in time of war was kept carefully out of the way in time of peace. It may well be that it was a sense of the unfairness of all this which led to Kitchener's reluctance to undertake office. It meant assuming responsibility for all the mistakes and shortcomings of his predecessors, it meant putting himself forward as a target of abuse for every fool in the country at a time when he would be unable to say a word in his own defence. But he accepted the responsibility and he accepted the abuse.

Mr. Winston Churchill in his interesting work has given us a vivid picture of the first few days of the war, and of the inefficient staff-work by Lord Kitchener's predecessors which was to throw so unfair and onerous a burden upon the new War Chief. At a Council of War convened in the afternoon of August 5th, 1914, at which Kitchener, although not yet formally appointed Secretary of State for War, was present, "Lord Roberts inquired whether it was not possible to base the British Army on Antwerp so as to strike, in conjunction with the Belgian armies, at the German flank and rear . . . *no plans had been worked out by the War Office for such a contingency. They had concentrated all their thought upon integral co-operation with the French*

<sup>1</sup> Officers judged to be incapable, during the South African War, were usually sent to Stellenbosch: thus, to be "Stellenbosched" acquired a certain significance.

*left wherever it might be. It was that or nothing.*"<sup>1</sup> The phrase is illuminating. Such a plan should have been worked out as a mere matter of staff routine.

On the day following, Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary of State for War. To quote again from Mr. Winston Churchill: "Lord Kitchener now came forward to the Cabinet, on almost the first occasion after he joined us, and in soldierly sentences proclaimed a series of inspiring and prophetic truths. 'Every one expected that the war would be short; but wars took unexpected courses, and we must now prepare for a long struggle. Such a conflict could not be ended on the sea or by sea-power alone. It could be ended only by great battles on the Continent. In these the British Empire must bear its part on a scale proportionate to its magnitude and power. *We must be prepared to put armies of millions in the field and maintain them for several years.* In no other way could we discharge our duty to our allies or to the world.'"<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Churchill states his conviction that had Lord Kitchener demanded compulsory service his request would have been acceded to. On the next page he suggests that the new volunteers actually raised should have been formed upon the cadres of the Territorial Force. He writes: ". . . the new Secretary of State had little knowledge of and no faith in the British territorial system. The name itself was to him a stumbling-block. In the war of 1870 he had been present at a battle on the Loire, probably Le Mans, in which the key of the position, confided to French Territorial troops, had been cast away, entailing the defeat of the whole army. He dwelt upon this incident to me on several occasions, and I know it had created fixed impressions

*The World Crisis*, Vol. I, p. 232. My italics.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 235. My italics.

in his mind. Vain to explain how entirely different were the characters of the troops forming the French and British Territorial forces—the former aged conscripts in their last period of service; the latter keen and ardent youths of strong military predilections. They were Territorials and that was the end of it.” The passage has been quoted in full because it fairly illustrates the type of hasty slipshod criticism so often applied to Lord Kitchener even by men who were well-informed and who occupied positions of influence and power. The French troops who abandoned the key of the position in the battle spoken of were not “aged conscripts in their last period of service,” they were troops raised by the “seemingly dead paper law,” quoted by Sir Ian Hamilton as having come “within an ace of saving France in 1870.” Mr. Churchill is in fact confusing the French Territorial forces of 1914 with the French Territorial forces of 1871, who were organized upon an entirely different principle and who were, in fact, hastily raised levies of a type strictly analogous to our own Territorials of 1914 save that they were raised by compulsory service. Mr. Churchill is right, however, in asserting that Lord Kitchener’s experiences with Chanzy’s army in 1871 had created fixed impressions in his mind. Chief among these was the folly of imagining that, where there existed no adequate machinery for raising, training, or equipping armies, the introduction of any system of compulsory service could in itself provide armies capable of taking the field against a well-trained, well-equipped, and resolute enemy. In a Memorandum upon the Defence of Australia, written at the request of a government which had accepted and put into application the principle of compulsory service, we find him laying down: “A National Force maintained at a high standard of efficiency can only be produced by the work of years. . . .



If plans and essential preparations have been deferred until an emergency arises, it will then be found too late to act, because the strain of passing from peace to war will entirely absorb the energies of all engaged, even when every possible contingency has been foreseen."

During the War of 1870-1, the French Republic unhesitatingly revived a "seemingly dead paper law," for compulsory service. Hundreds of thousands of men were placed under arms. The French fleet held command of the sea. Guns, rifles and equipment were purchased upon a vast scale from Great Britain. These, joined to the very large military manufacturing establishments fostered by the old Imperial government, and the relatively more simple conditions of the war, sufficed adequately to equip the new levies. Moreover, the French are a military race with immense experience in dealing with improvised troops. Not only during the French Revolutionary Wars but in Napoleon's campaigns in 1813, great armies had been raised almost by a "stamp of the foot," armies which had played a worthy part in the annals of warfare. Yet with all these great traditions behind them, with all the advantages conferred by sea-power, vast financial resources, and a spirit of unstinting sacrifice, the "seemingly dead paper law" resulted in practice, in a most hopeless chaos, and in a most useless sacrifice of blood and treasure. It may be said, in fact, that the actual fighting value of a body of hastily raised troops is almost in inverse ratio to its numerical strength. A body of one hundred men, even if entirely without military experience, if possessed of moderate intelligence and courage, will within a few short weeks gain sufficient practical knowledge of military technique to face an equal number of regular troops with a fair chance of success. But multiply this number by one thousand and

you introduce a whole series of technical problems which can only be solved successfully by a most careful adjustment of means to end, and by a very much more prolonged and elaborate system of training. To move a body of one hundred thousand men from one place to another, in itself involves many problems. A railway staff is necessary to arrange movements by rail, railway time-tables must be drawn up, and trains allotted for the transportation of the various units. Detailed and careful measures must be taken for the supply of food and ammunition to the troops in movement. Approach-marches must be worked out to bring the various divisions or corps into contact with the enemy. And, the battle once joined, the combat of an army of one hundred thousand men represents a technical achievement in quite a different category to the combat of one hundred. You find yourself called upon to engage upon manœuvres which may involve days and even weeks of fighting, you find yourself called upon to arrange for the regular supply of food and munitions to the troops involved in the fighting, you find yourself obliged to consider the co-operation of artillery, infantry, cavalry and aeroplanes ; in fact, just as an engineer in many cases finds that a full-sized engine means mechanical stresses and problems to which a small-scale model affords no clue, so the demands upon an army-leader and his staff, and upon the army as a whole in a great battle, are infinitely more complex and involve an infinitely higher level of achievement, if they are to be carried out successfully, than the combat of one hundred men.

All this is, of course, the merest A B C, the merest commonplace of military criticism. Our apology for dealing with the subject so much at length must be the fact that it is a commonplace of military criticism which Lord Kitchener's critics consistently ignore. Had the French

Government in the "People's War" confined themselves to enlisting armies of volunteers, no doubt they would have placed in the field smaller numbers; but these smaller numbers, made up of a better stamp of men, would certainly have been very much more efficient, for *practical purposes*, than the vast but unwieldy numbers of raw conscripts. Moreover, starting upon a more modest scale, the armies could have been expanded subsequently by conscription after having settled down to a certain degree of efficiency. Such undoubtedly was the lesson which Lord Kitchener drew from his experiences with the French in 1870-1. He has been bitterly assailed for his refusal to demand compulsory service at the very outbreak of the war. Colonel Repington with his customary light-heartedness of statement writes: "Had Asquith or Lord K. come forward at any time to announce the need for compulsion the country would joyfully have accepted the sacrifice."<sup>1</sup>

Sir Charles Callwell, a much fairer critic, writes: "A good many of us in the War Office were a little inclined to cavil at our Chief's deliberation in the matter of demanding a system of National Service . . . one realizes that if he made a mistake over this subject it was in not establishing the principle by statute at the very beginning."

Lord Kitchener stated his own attitude towards the question of compulsory service in a speech in the House of Lords, January 5th, 1916. "I speak only as a soldier and with a single eye to the successful conduct of the war. I feel sure that every one will agree when I say that the fullest and fairest trial has been given to the system which I found in existence *and of which I felt it my duty to make the best use.*"<sup>2</sup> We are now asking Parliament to sanction a change, as it has been proved that, in the special circumstances of this

<sup>1</sup> *The First World War*, Vol. I, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> My italics.

utterly unprecedented struggle, the existing system, without modification, is not equal to maintaining the Army which is needed to secure victory."

It would surely be childish to assume that Lord Kitchener, holding as he did that the war would be decided by the "last million" which the British Empire could throw into the scale, that "we must be prepared to put armies of millions in the field and maintain them for several years," failed to foresee that in the last resource armies upon this magnitude could be raised only by compulsory military service; but it would surely be equally childish to make it a measure of reproach against him that he refrained from attempting to "rush" the country into sweeping measures of conscription for which there was at the time no actual military necessity, and the results of which would merely have been to add to the general confusion. There is an unfortunate tendency on the part of Lord Kitchener's critics in this connection to lose sight of the *end* in the *means*. The end and aim of Lord Kitchener's term of office as Secretary of State for War was not to raise great conscript armies, but to beat the enemy. Among the means required to beat the enemy figured armies to be raised upon an altogether unprecedented scale, but whether these armies were to be raised by compulsory service or by volunteering was in reality a question of quite minor importance, the important thing was to have the armies there, and to have them there in the shortest possible time compatible with efficiency. Now, it must be very apparent that a sudden sweeping law of conscription, whilst there existed no machinery for raising, training or equipping recruits, would have worked out in practice merely in a repetition of the unfortunate experiences of France in the People's War of 1870-1: vast numbers of men would have been placed under arms,

but the difficulty of training these vast levies into efficient troops would have been strictly proportionate to the numbers raised, the quality of the men and of their officers, and the existing facilities for training and equipping the new troops. Where, as in the case of Great Britain, there existed, as we shall see more in detail later on, an almost entire lack of officers and N.C.O.'s for training recruits ; of arms, uniforms, barracks, hutments or stores of any kind, it is difficult to see how Lord Kitchener's critics can fail to realize that to add to the existing disadvantages the problem of dealing with vast numbers of *unwilling recruits* would have been to make confusion worse confounded. Men raised under the voluntary system had the advantage that they were as a general rule keen upon the service, anxious to learn their work, prepared to accept hardships with a jest, and to cooperate loyally with their officers in fitting themselves for the grim work at hand. But the conscript is, from the very nature of things, passive in the endurance alike of hardship as of danger, where he is not pushed or prodded into action he remains indifferent if not actively antagonistic. In regular armies possessed of a tradition of conscription, and where there exist powerful *cadres* of trained officers and N.C.O.'s, to mould recruits into soldiers, the difference in *moral* between conscripts and volunteers is not so apparent, certainly it is not sufficient to counteract any marked difference in training or in armament possessed by either one or the other. History records cases in which conscripts have defeated volunteers and vice versa. But in the case of hastily raised, improvised armies, the difference in *moral* between the conscript and the volunteer plays an enormous part. The French troops in Spain laughed at the Spanish regular troops, and defeated them with ease in pitched battles. But the Spanish Guerrillas were felt to

be a very formidable foe, and played a part in the Peninsular War usually overlooked by British historians. So also in the Tyrolese Insurrection of 1809, volunteer forces encountered conscripts with very considerable success. Yet had it been attempted to raise forces similar to the Spanish Guerrillas or the Tyrolese bands by means of compulsory service, these would have lost at a stroke most of their efficiency for war. The crux of the whole matter is, that given equal *disadvantages* troops will endure these with greater fortitude, and settle down into efficient soldiers very much more rapidly if made up of keen and ardent volunteers than if made up of unwilling conscripts.

Moreover, it will always remain a most debatable point as to how the country would have responded to a demand for conscription in 1914. We observe alike in the case of Colonel Repington and of Mr. Winston Churchill, a certain tendency to indulge in *obiter dicta* which does not always sound very convincing. We may recall in this connection Sir Ian Hamilton's remark already quoted. "During perhaps two or three months of the South African War conscription would have been accepted, but I put it to you that the nation would never have swallowed the dose of physic during the preliminary or later phases of the campaign," i.e. it would be necessary to choose the moment for applying conscription with the greatest care, the "dose of physic" must be brought to the patient when popular feeling had been lashed to a fever of patriotism in which the nation was prepared to recklessly accept all and any sacrifices. It could not be expected to accept so revolutionary and drastic a measure in cold blood, nor would it be wise to propose such a law to a country weary and disillusionized by the sufferings and sacrifices of a prolonged war. The middle period was the time to choose.

It is absurd, in criticizing Lord Kitchener's policy, to argue back from the war-psychology of 1916 to the war-psychology of 1914. An attempt to "rush" the country upon so momentous a question might have had disastrous consequences. Even if the Cabinet had accepted the measure—and there were members pledged to oppose it—there existed in the country a powerful party doubtful of the wisdom of embarking upon war with Germany, sceptical as to the *bona fides* of the French and Russian governments, and even, when not professedly Pacifist, opposed upon principle to a policy of entangling, continental alliances. This party included men such as Lord Morley and John Burns, men who carried weight with the Liberal and Labour Parties, and above all things with the "Nonconformist Conscience," so potent a factor in English political life. Later on in the war, when the *Lusitania* incident and the Zeppelin bombardments of London had roused the country to a frenzy of fury against the foe, when the wild war-fever swept the Empire from one world's end to the other, the voice of the Peace Party dwindled away and became silent, but in 1914 none of these things had happened, and if there were any measures which could have played into the hands of the Pacifists, and have given them a backing in the country, it would have been the hasty and premature proposal of a measure of conscription. At a time when we were professedly taking up arms against "Prussian militarism," it would certainly have given rise to the counter-cry that we were adopting militarism ourselves. The cry would have arisen that the nation was being "dragooned" into conscription. The Pacifist and anti-militarist elements all over the country, temporarily silenced by the suddenness and immensity of the shock of war, would have been stung into new activity by a measure threatening their most cherished

principles. It is doubtful as to how the country would have responded. The English Mind does not lend itself kindly to new ideas and exalted idealism. In any case it is clear that so grave and hazardous a measure could have been proposed by Lord Kitchener only upon grounds of imperative necessity. Neither in 1914 nor in 1915 did such imperative necessity actually exist. There was never a time in 1914 in which Kitchener could honestly have demanded conscription on the ground that he could not get volunteers. It may be said that it would have been fairer to have adopted conscription from the very outset of the war ; that our requirements could have been adjusted more scientifically ; that men who were engaged in industries vital to the production of munitions were enlisted and sent abroad. Yet it may be pointed out that the Americans, adopting compulsory service in 1917, and setting themselves to the task of hastily improvising a great army, did not in practice achieve anything like the results attained by Lord Kitchener during an equal period of time, and that " scientific adjustment " is apt to prove a deceptive phrase covering a multitude of sins. The comparison between the results attained by Lord Kitchener, and those attained by the Americans in dealing with an analogous problem is made more in detail further in this book. Suffice it to say here that, at the beginning of the war, there were very few people who had any conception as to the far-reaching effects which the struggle was to have upon the entire fabric of our economic life. It is extremely improbable that, had conscription been introduced, the War Office would have shown any disposition to regard skilled artisans as specially exempted from military service. War Office circles, in general, were sceptical as to Kitchener's forecast of a three years' war. Nor had the War Office ever shown any par-



ticular tendency to be fair or scientific in its estimates as to military requirements. A certain famous telegram sent during the South African War, "No more mounted troops required" may not have entirely escaped the Public Memory. It would be making a very large assumption to believe that, under a system of compulsory service, artisans engaged in Munitions-Industries would not have been enlisted and sent to India, or wherever else the armed forces of the Empire were held to be in need of replenishment.

On the other hand, Lord Kitchener's experience of the People's War in France, as Mr. Churchill tells us, had afforded him an object lesson upon which he often dilated, of the folly of imagining that troops hastily raised under a system of compulsion could be pitted against highly-trained troops. Had conscription actually become law in 1914, it is difficult to see what it could have done which the voluntary system did not do, and which this did *better*. If the country had been willing to accept such a law, millions of men could have been raised, but these millions would have been wholly lacking in *cadres* of trained or even semi-trained officers and N.C.O.'s, and in arms and equipment. To have raised millions of men under these conditions would have meant chaos. It is surely to show a strange lack of proportion to assert that Lord Kitchener, at the outset of the most gigantic conflict known to mankind, a conflict the titanic proportions of which he alone even dimly appreciated, and which he was convinced would last for many years, should have hazarded his own position with the Cabinet, and his own power to organize usefully the military resources of the Empire, for the sake of advocating a measure of conscription which he did not want, which if passed by the Cabinet would have put these in peril of a disunited country, and which if accepted by the country would have

produced men whom he could not use and who would have had to be left in their own homes.

That in the later phases of the war conscription became necessary, and was advocated by Lord Kitchener from his seat in the House of Lords, in no manner affects the issue that it would have been an unwise and injudicious measure to have attempted to ram this down the country's throat in 1914.

It may serve, however, to relieve a great many current misconceptions if we publish the actual statistics as to the numbers of men raised by Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War up to the time in which Lord Derby became Director of Recruiting. In the fourteen months from August 1914 to September 1915, there joined the Army, 2,257,521 men. Lord Derby became Director of Recruiting in October 1915. From that time to the end of the war, viz. a period of thirty-seven months and eleven days, there joined the Army under Lord Derby's Group System and the Conscription Acts, a grand total of 2,713,521 men, a total only slightly exceeding the numbers raised by Lord Kitchener in less than half the time. It is hard to see how the amazing results thus gained could have been improved upon by the introduction of conscription, and it is hard to see what possible justification there can be for a writer such as Colonel Repington gravely to inform us that Lord Kitchener "made the mistake of ignoring the County Associations and the organization which Lord Haldane had left behind him as the foundation of a future National Army. . . . Lord K., when numbers began to fail, concealed the fact from the Government and the Public, as he had done in the case of the shells."

Lord Kitchener has been very often criticized for refusing to take the Territorial Force organized by Lord Haldane as

a basis for the expansion of the existing military forces. It was a decision which gave rise to many heart-burnings. The Territorial Force had been in a sense the special protégé of the soldiers at Whitehall who had been responsible for our military preparations. It had represented the answer made by the existing military authorities to the crusade of the National Service League. The fourteen Territorial divisions had loomed big in political speeches upon military problems. The Force had a sentimental hold upon the country. It was a survival of the old Volunteers. Moreover, it was a force which was the special creation of a powerful and popular politician backed with all the ægis of the great Liberal Party. And in latter days, since Lord Haldane has been so remorselessly attacked for the part which he played in the period immediately before the war, there is a certain tone of bitterness in the criticisms upon Lord Kitchener for declining to use the Territorial scheme as the basis of his new organization. And yet there are signs that the very men who had "fathered," so to speak, the Territorial Force in time of peace absolutely declined to accept it as a serious military factor at the commencement of the war. The Force was practically untrained. This was so far acknowledged that the statutes governing enlistment provided that Territorial divisions should be embodied for six months' training upon mobilization. But the first step taken by the military authorities *before* Lord Kitchener had become Secretary of State for War, was summarily to remove all the regular officers and N.C.O.'s attached to the Force as adjutants and instructors! A most extraordinary measure, which strikingly illuminates the general muddle-headedness of War Office policy before Lord Kitchener appeared upon the scene, and the real light in which the regular officers responsible for our military policy, down

to the very days of the war, looked upon the Territorial Force. Here we have the force which was to have been the framework of our future National Army, a framework which Lord Kitchener is attacked for having "ignored." Yet the first action on the part of the men who had called this organization into being, was to take away from it practically every man possessed of a specialized knowledge of military training! It was, of course, only part of a general theory of a short sharp war which would be decided by the Russian "steam-roller," and in which we should need every trained man to bolster up France over the critical period before Russia could complete her mobilization. When, however, as already mentioned, we find Sir John French, at the time of the Battle of the Aisne, bitterly accusing Lord Kitchener of keeping back men and stores vitally needed at the front for the sake of training vast armies which would not be ready till the war was over, we may recall that this former as C.I.G.S. was intimately connected with the Territorial Force, and it becomes clear that this Force was never intended, in any true sense of the words, to be the framework of a National Army. The function laid down for the Territorials in the pre-war conceptions of the problem before us was strictly limited and purely defensive. To beat off raids against our coasts, to supply perhaps a limited flow of volunteers to the fighting forces; to reassure the old women of both sexes; that was all that the regular staff-officers who had designed the scheme could see in the Territorial Force. The men were enlisted only for Home Defence, there was, as we have seen, no conception that even Territorial battalions could be sent as units across the seas, much less that Territorial divisions could be sent to France, Egypt and India; there was no thought of second and third line Territorials, to expand these into a great National Army.

It was left for Lord Kitchener, the man who is said to have ignored the Force, to introduce these revolutionary and far-reaching changes into its organization.

Lord Esher has written, "Lord K. knew nothing of the Territorial Force, its organization or origin." Considering that Lord Kitchener had held command at the Coronation of King George, a function at which units of the Territorial Force were strongly represented, this statement appears somewhat remarkable. What is not generally realized is that the new Secretary of State had entered the War Office with views fundamentally different to those of his predecessors, a scheme of organization which involved, in fact, a complete break with British military traditions. It had been accepted heretofore, almost as an axiom, that the chief offensive weapons of Great Britain in war were her Fleet, and her enormous financial resources, her armies came long behind her ships and her money, not merely in popular estimation, but in the estimation of those truly responsible for her military policy and for her diplomacy in the years before the war. It was left for Lord Kitchener to preach a new doctrine. Never before had it been suggested that the British Empire could achieve victory in war but by great battles fought on land. Never before had a British government been told that our Empire must bear its part in a land-war, "on a scale proportionate to its magnitude and power." The British army up till then had been organized upon what may for convenience be styled the Peninsular tradition, the tradition of a small force acting as a contingent to an allied army, the tradition of an army to be employed in subsidiary enterprises and in colonial expeditions. In fact it was an edition brought down to date of the good old British military policy of half-hearted measures and of strength frittered away upon

a multitude of petty objectives. Lord Kitchener changed all this. He proposed far-reaching measures to meet a situation which had never been contemplated by our military authorities in time of peace. He set his hand to a policy which no lesser man could have urged successfully upon our government. There arises the question: How far would it have been possible for the new Secretary of State to have used the Territorial Force as the basis of a scheme for which its constitution was by no means suited, and for a purpose which no one, least of all its author, had ever dreamt of?

Lord Kitchener had his eyes fixed upon *offensive* expansion. We learn from a Memorandum upon the Munitions supply circulated to the Cabinet in June 1915, that "estimates for orders in the early stages of the war were in the first place based upon an establishment in the field of 1,100,000 men with a proper proportion of artillery."<sup>1</sup> A field-army of 1,100,000 men would represent, of course, with depots, a grand total of upwards of 2,000,000 men. The problem which confronted the new War Chief was thus, that of raising within an unprecedentedly short space of time 2,000,000 men, *willing to undertake liability for service abroad*. We have already seen that the Territorial Force was enlisted purely for Home Defence. With an establishment of 315,000 men, it had a nominal actual strength of 251,706. It was virtually untrained, a considerable proportion of men enlisted were known to be below the age limit for foreign service, and no single man had ever been submitted to a medical examination as to fitness to serve abroad. An inquiry circulated amongst members of the Force, before

<sup>1</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War*, p. 468. Most statistics quoted are taken from this source.

the war, as to willingness to serve abroad had resulted in that about 20,000 men, less than *ten per cent.* of the nominal total, had expressed their willingness to undertake such a duty. The fact that the Territorial Force subsequently displayed magnificent patriotism and superb fighting power should not blind us to the fact that Lord Kitchener had to deal with matters as he found them. Had he taken over the scheme to form the basis of his new National Army, his first duty would have been to pull it to pieces, to make such radical and sweeping changes in its organization and constitution as would have resulted in widespread confusion. The first thing required would have been a special Act of Parliament to make the Force liable for service overseas. Lord Kitchener speaking in the House of Lords August 25th, 1914, mentioned that 70 battalions of Territorials had volunteered for service overseas, 70 from 194 is less than half. If it was proposed to make the Force *as a whole* liable for foreign service, what was to be done with the battalions which had *not* volunteered? Would the government have attempted to coerce them? Would such a course have been practicable? Would it not have been a distinct breach of faith to men who had enlisted voluntarily for Home Defence suddenly to make them liable, without their own consent, to service abroad? Would it not have worked out in practice into an extremely unfair and impolitic measure of conscription? But since we cannot seriously conceive of the Government, in 1914, as imposing such a liability without leaving the men the option of resignation or of transfer to some purely local defence body, we are forced to the conclusion that in practice such a measure would have meant splitting the Territorial Force in twain. A considerable proportion of the men would no doubt have been prepared to accept the liability, but others in those

early days, whilst the country was still far from realizing all that the war implied, might well have been disposed to resent an attempt to rush them into undertaking an obligation specifically omitted from their contract of enlistment. It would thus have been a policy of very doubtful wisdom to have begun by making sweeping changes in the Territorial Force. It is unfair to judge all these things with our post-war knowledge. In 1914 men had singularly little to go upon as concerned the Territorial Force. The old Volunteers, to whom the Territorials were the successors, had never been put to any great test of war. Napoleon's armies, baffled by Nelson, turned to smite down Austria at Austerlitz, without giving the Volunteers, assembled to oppose the dreaded Boulogne Flotilla, a chance of smelling powder. The Invasion Scare of the Third Napoleon failed equally to materialize. A few Volunteer Companies sent to serve with regular battalions in South Africa were all that the Force had to boast about in the way of fighting traditions. Nor, at the outbreak of the war, did this Force make the impression of being a useful framework upon which to build up a National Army. Sir Charles Callwell, an officer in peculiarly favourable circumstances to pass a fair and balanced judgment, writes, alluding to the weakness of the Territorials at this time: "The consequence of this shortage was that, at the very moment when the Government and the country were on the first occasion for a century confronted by a really grave and complex military situation, at the very moment when there was a scare as to German projects of an immediate invasion, that category of our land forces which was specially ear-marked for the defence of the British Isles was not in a position to fulfil its functions. The Sixth Division, properly forming part of the Expeditionary Force, had to be fetched over from Ireland to East



Anglia to bolster up the Territorials, and Sir John French was deprived of its use for six weeks at a very critical time. The ranks of the Territorial Force filled up very rapidly *after* mobilization, but from the Home Defence point of view that was too late. We required our home defence army to be ready at once, so that our overseas army could be despatched complete to the Continent without *arrière pensée*."

This passage illustrates not merely the shortcomings of the Territorials, but the extremely short-sighted policy followed by Lord Haldane and his military advisers. The public, hypnotized by the fourteen Territorial divisions, is apt to forget that, upon the departure of the Expeditionary Force, there remained in the depots no less than 121,192 men, of whom half were Special Reservists with at least six months' training and the remainder "young soldiers" and surplus Army Reservists, all of them infinitely better trained than the Territorials. There were, besides, 9 batteries of Horse Artillery, 27 Field-Batteries, surplus companies of Engineers, and other details. Why no attempt should have been made to form these into mobile brigades and divisions for purposes of home defence is not quite clear. One hundred and one battalions of Special Reservists and "young soldiers," averaging 800 rifles apiece, if meant primarily for the purpose of providing drafts to troops in the field, could have performed this function equally well if organized into, say, six divisions for home defence. They would have been rather short of artillery, but then, owing to considerations of transport, this would have been the very arm in which an invading army would be most likely to be deficient also. It is difficult to follow the reasoning which deemed it worth while to form wholly untrained Territorials, armed with obsolescent guns and rifles, into divisions which at the outset of the war existed principally upon paper, but

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which wholly ignored the much more solid basis for a home defence army afforded by the 121,000 regular and semi-regular Reservists who remained in the country, surplus to the Expeditionary Force. These could at least have provided *interim* formations whilst the Territorials were learning their work. We are struck once more by the curiously fragmentary fashion in which the Imperial General Staff had gone about its work in the days before the war. Had the problem of home defence been efficiently studied, and the best use made of the material actually to hand, there should have been no real reason to have kept back two out of the six divisions of our scanty forces.

In any case it is clear that Lord Kitchener found the arrangements for home defence to be in a state of chaos, and that the Territorial Force by no means offered an encouraging basis for the foundation of his proposed new National Army. We may get his attitude to the problem best in his own words. "No one dislikes change more than I do; but if necessary I do not fear it. I would certainly not continue a rotten system because I was afraid to stretch out my hand and take a sound one." The Territorial Force had shown very great deficiencies at the very moment when it was called upon to play an essential rôle in the general scheme of defence, it was a force, moreover, which in the early days of the war could only have been fitted into Lord Kitchener's scheme by sweeping changes which would have resulted in creating at least temporarily a state of immense confusion. Is it really to be assumed that after having taken this measure, after having torn up the existing organization, and given rise to a good deal of soreness and bitterness, the War Minister would have attained results appreciably greater than those attained by the scheme actually put into operation? Here are some facts. Up to January, 1916,

there enlisted into the "Kitchener" armies, 1,740,877 recruits, during the same period there enlisted into the Territorial Force 725,842. Lord Kitchener is said to have "made the mistake of ignoring the County Associations and the organization which Lord Haldane had left behind him as the foundation of a future National Army." In view of the fact that by his own unaided efforts, by the magic of his name and by dint of the driving power of his personality, he was able to attract to the colours much more than two and a half times as many men as all the County Associations put together, it would not seem that the interests of his country suffered in any material degree from the methods of recruiting adopted. It may well be doubted, indeed, whether, had recruiting been put from the outset in the hands of the County Associations, the country would have responded to *their* appeal to join the local Territorials with quite the fervent enthusiasm with which it welcomed Lord Kitchener's call to join the new armies. Lord Esher, a critic far from friendly, writes, "The disorganization was complete; and yet from this chaos there arose unit after unit, Division after Division, until the country was covered from end to end with camps and drilling youths. There was plenty of captious criticism, for the heavy anxieties of the time made men captious, and there are still persons who believe Lord Kitchener chose wrong means for the miracle which he wrought; but there are others with a faculty for clenching tangible truths, who are quietly disposed to think that England was lucky at that crucial moment of political instability to find at her call this consummate disorganizer and master of the art of improvisation."

It is to make a very large assumption to say that the hosts of men who came forward to the magic call of "join Kitchener's army," would have responded in similar fashion

to the call of their local county magnates. Something more than mere exhortation is needed to rouse men to fight and die, something there must be to kindle the imagination, to set men's hearts beating, to set men's blood a-boil. County Associations were bodies of widely differing outlook and value. Whilst in some cases they would have been successful in attracting recruits, in others they would undoubtedly have been failures. Certainly they could never have replaced the grand concerted effort by which Lord Kitchener captured the imaginations of his countrymen and transformed the British Empire into a great military power.

One point must also be alluded to, which latter-day critics consistently ignore. The men who joined the "Kitchener" armies were available for drafting all over the world, and into regular battalions. The Territorials, even when they accepted liability for foreign service, did not become available for drafting until in 1917 the Conscription Acts had, for practical purposes, merged them into the regular army. Up till 1917 the total number of Territorials who had joined up into the regular army was 1501 !

Lord Kitchener faced with the problem of raising a new army of 1,100,000 men, with proportionate artillery and stores, besides maintaining units actually in the field against the constant stream of casualties, issued the famous call for 100,000 volunteers. This number was not chosen at random. It was necessary to establish *cadres* of officers and men for the new formations. This was also a consideration which ruled any sweeping measure of conscription out of court. Men likely to become useful instructors to the new units would be much more probably obtained by voluntary enlistment than by a system of compulsory service. The scheme adopted provided for the systematic building up of a great army. The "first hundred thousand"

were to be organized into six divisions. These were to be expanded subsequently into twelve and then again into twenty-four. With the divisions already embodied, this would make a total of thirty. The scheme, as laid down in the first few weeks of the war, was modified very considerably in practice. Exigencies of training, lack of permanent camps or hutments, rendered the expansion of units much less systematic than was contemplated originally. Again the Territorial divisions which in the original scheme were ear-marked for home defence, having filled up under the general impetus to recruiting given by the war, and having volunteered for foreign service, added fourteen divisions to the new armies. But, with the duration of the war, even this increase was found to be totally insufficient, the thirty divisions were expanded once more into sixty, and by the time of Lord Kitchener's death he had fixed upon seventy divisions with the Expeditionary Force in France as the minimum of our military requirements.

In its essentials, the system introduced by Lord Kitchener was an extension of that associated with the name of Lord Cardwell. Its working was to graft extra battalions on to existing regiments, which battalions could be sent abroad as units, or used for drafting, as might be desired. The British army had always worked by single battalions. On the Continent of Europe and in the American army, the regiment, usually with three battalions, is not only an administrative but a tactical unit. Its battalions, as a rule, fight side by side, they have a common band, a common mess, and form parts of a homogeneous whole. Two such regiments form a brigade of six battalions, and two such brigades form a division.<sup>1</sup> But in the British Army the

<sup>1</sup> During the war modifications were introduced, the division being formed of three regiments, i.e. 9 battalions.

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regiment is an administrative, not a tactical unit. The British brigade is made up of four battalions taken from various regiments, and the higher organization of the army is based upon the battalion and the brigade. Each battalion has its own colours, its own mess, its own band. It is a system peculiar to the British Empire, known to no other army in the world, a system which, as Lord Kitchener realized, has the advantage of a certain flexibility. The number of battalions to a regiment can be increased almost indefinitely without producing an unwieldy tactical unit. Instead of raising brand-new regiments with no traditions behind them, the small number of existing regiments can be made the basis of a vast expansion carrying on their splendid records and magnificent esprit de corps in the new armies. Such was the policy actually pursued by the new War Chief. He set himself to an immense expansion of the regular army. The new armies were made up of regular soldiers enlisted for the duration of the war. They were, in the truest sense of the word, volunteer-regulars, liable for service all over the world, and in any regiment. The great difference between the new army men and the old regulars was in the quality of the men and in the nature of the appeal made to them to join. The old army was a small professional body, recruited in the main from the "hungry hobbledehoy," and the fundamental appeal was to service for pay and good professional prospects. The new armies were recruited from the flower of British manhood, and the fundamental appeal was to patriotism and to fighting instinct. It is necessary to appreciate this difference in *moral* to understand the amazing rapidity with which the new armies settled down in the teeth of incredible disadvantages, to learn the work of soldiers. Nevertheless, from the very outset, the new armies were voluntarily enlisted *regular* armies. They

were brought into being with amazing speed. The First New Army of six divisions was constituted by an Army Order of August 21st, 1914. The Second New Army was established three weeks later, and the Third and Fourth New Armies within *another three days*. They were at first mere agglomerations of raw recruits. But Lord Kitchener, amidst all the demands made upon him from the front, amidst all the difficulties of training and improvising a new army whilst caught in the whirl of a war destined to shake the economic life of the world to its foundations, steadily declined to send units to the front until they had undergone a course of training calculated to give them a reasonable chance against a well-trained and resolute foe. It was not until they had been embodied for nine months that the First New Army was sent to the front. The Second and Third Armies followed close on their heels. The Fourth and Fifth Armies, whose training had been very scrappy, owing to difficulties with quarters, training grounds and equipment, had been embodied for a year before they were sent to the front. We may observe in this steadfast refusal to expose his newly raised levies to the cruel test of war before they had had time to settle down and to acquire discipline and cohesion, the influence of those "fixed impressions" left upon Kitchener by his experience of "The People's War" in France, about which Mr. Churchill in his book comments so adversely.

It is seldom realized, even by well-informed critics, to what extent Lord Kitchener was handicapped by the total lack of foresight on the part of his predecessors, and by the extent to which the British Imperial General Staff had suffered itself to be hypnotized by the French. As Mr. Churchill very correctly says, speaking of the so-called Haldane plan: "Everything in that Minister's eight years'

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tenure of the War Office had led up to this and had been sacrificed for this. . . . To place an army of four or six divisions . . . on the left of the French line within twelve to fourteen days . . . he had concentrated all his efforts and his stinted resources." We have already seen that Lord Kitchener found the arrangements for Home Defence to be in a state of chaos. We have seen that most of the adjutants of the Territorial Force and their regular N.C.O.'s were withdrawn to their regular units upon outbreak of the war. It may cast some light upon the incredibly short-sighted views prevailing when we read that: "In the Flying Corps the majority of the officers were sent abroad, hardly any experienced pilots being left to teach the new recruits; nearly all the qualified instructors in physical training, both at the central school and in the commands, were sent off to rejoin their regiments at the front; even the Army School of Cookery was closed on mobilization and the Instructors sent off to cook for Headquarters in France, thus leaving no one to instruct the new armies in this very essential matter for the soldiers' comfort and efficiency . . . the same tale might be told of every branch of the Service." <sup>1</sup>

Lord Esher has termed Kitchener, "a consummate disorganizer and master of the art of improvisation." It is a curious phrase which gives the impression that the author least of all knows what it is really supposed to mean. But so far as concerns the Army at home it may fairly be said that the work of disorganization had been so effectually done by Lord French and the British General Staff between them, that nothing save perhaps an actual invasion of Great Britain could have made things worse.

Much has been said about the pushing of the General

<sup>1</sup> *Raising and Training the New Armies*, by Williams, p. 58.



Staff into the background at the War Office during the early months of the war, but it must be remembered that Lord Kitchener was accustomed to deal with men as he found them and that apart from any question of personalities (Sir Charles Douglas and Sir J. Wolfe-Murray were not exactly the type of men likely to impress a man of Kitchener's calibre) the Imperial General Staff had not made an exactly useful contribution to the problem which confronted Kitchener and the nation. They had grossly overestimated the power of the French Army, they had failed to prepare plans and estimates which should have been part of the routine work of a General Staff in time of peace, they had shown themselves hopelessly short-sighted in regard to the duration of the war. Lord Kitchener was perhaps the only soldier in England occupying a responsible position, who, whilst well acquainted with the ideas of the French High Command, thoroughly and whole-heartedly disagreed with them. Lord Esher relates how on the morning of the 13th of August a bevy of French Staff Officers, shepherded by Colonel Huguet, left Lord Kitchener's room at the War Office, after listening to his warning that their appreciation of the military situation was mistaken . . . "they were sceptical but impressed by the *justesse* of his reasoning."<sup>1</sup>

The fact must be placed upon record that in the chaos which he found confronting him on August 6th when he took over the reins of office as Secretary of State for War, Kitchener could have found no reason to base any particularly high estimate as to the Staff-work of the British

<sup>1</sup> *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 32. Lord Esher states incorrectly that it was Kitchener who, as Secretary of State for War, sent 4 divisions to France. As a matter of fact the decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting, August 5th, one day before Kitchener was appointed. There are many inaccuracies in the book.

Army or to place any particular confidence in the military sagacity of the men who had been responsible for it. Certainly he could have found no reason for considering the military judgment of men such as Wilson or Robertson superior to his own. Nor, during the early months of the struggle, did he ever experience anything but consistent pettiness and obstruction from the very soldiers who, during time of peace, had had most to do with the organization of the British Army. As this is a fact which has been somewhat obscured from the public it may be well to quote chapter and verse for the statement. Sir Charles Callwell writes: "It is a matter of common knowledge—anybody who was unaware of it before the appearance of Lord French's '1914' will have learnt it from that volume—that the relations between Lord Kitchener and some of those up at the top in connection with our troops on the Western Front were, practically from the outset, not quite satisfactory in character.

"The attitude taken up by G.H.Q. over a comparatively small matter during the first few days is an example of this. The Secretary of State had laid his hands upon one officer and one or two non-commissioned officers of each battalion of the Expeditionary Force, and had diverted these to act as drill-instructors and so forth, for the new formations which he proposed to create. That his action in this should have been objected to within the bereft unit was natural enough; their officers could hardly be expected to take the long view on the question at such a juncture. But that the higher authorities of our little army proceeding to the front should have taken the measure so amiss was unfortunate. And it was, moreover, instructive, indicating as it did in somewhat striking fashion, the lack of sense of proportion prevalent amongst some of those included in G.H.Q. . . .

it may perhaps be mentioned here that there was a disposition to deride and decry the New Army at St. Omer almost up to the date, May 1915, when the first three of its divisions, the Ninth, Twelfth and Fourteenth, made their appearance in the war zone.”<sup>1</sup>

Sir Charles Callwell tells us earlier in his work of Lord Kitchener that “owing to military authorities in Whitehall not seeing quite eye to eye with the new Secretary of State when he took up his appointment, he was to some small extent working in an atmosphere of latent hostility to his measures. This state of affairs was, however, of very short duration, and certainly did not hamper his operations in the slightest degree; he would, indeed, have made uncommonly short work of anybody whom he found to be actively opposing him, or even to be hanging back.”

Not the least among Lord Kitchener's difficulties at the outset of the war was that the War Office, as a whole, was disposed to resent his appointment. In particular the Generals who had been responsible for military preparation before the war found themselves placed under the authority of a soldier with whom they had never worked together in time of peace, and whose ideas with regard to the conduct and duration of the war differed in a most fundamental fashion from their own. It is extremely probable that had men of the calibre of Wilson and Robertson been brought into close association with the future Secretary of State before the war, they would not have allowed themselves to become so obsessed with the doctrines of the French General Staff as to ignore other and fundamental aspects of the problem of Imperial Defence. We may in this respect feel disposed to question the wisdom

<sup>1</sup> *Experiences of a Dug-Out*, Major-General Sir Charles Callwell, pp. 55-6.

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of Lord Esher's committee in abolishing the office of Commander-in-Chief. Had this office still existed, Lord Kitchener's claim to it, after having vacated the command in India, would have been so strong that no Government would have ventured to ignore it. He would then have been brought in close association with the General Staff, and in a position to make his views felt *before* the war instead of only when the crisis was actually upon us.

How Kitchener as Commander-in-Chief would have worked with Lord Haldane as Secretary of State for War is quite a different question.

It is conceivable enough that had Robertson and Wilson remained at the War Office instead of going off with the Expeditionary Force, and had they consequently been in close personal contact with Lord Kitchener, much of the friction which arose at the beginning of the war between G.H.Q. in France and the Secretary of State for War would have been avoided. It is worthy of comment in this connection, that Sir William Robertson when appointed C.I.G.S. seems to have found no difficulty in working harmoniously with Lord Kitchener. Lord Esher writes: "To the chagrin of those who had looked for his support against Lord K., he was found firmly at one with the Secretary of State. . . . The wish in certain quarters to be rid of Lord K. had not diminished . . . Robertson fathomed the object of the politicians who had pressed for his appointment . . . he was not happy about the position of Lord K. . . . he wrote on the 4th of February 1916: 'We owe more to him than to anyone. Where would we be to-day but for the New Armies? He was not well served. If they want to be rid of him, why not move him? I imagine they dare not. Apparently I have been a disappointment in not knocking him down. But it is no part

of a C.I.G.S.'s duty to intrigue against his S. of S. At any rate I won't. He has been all that could be desired so far as I am concerned." <sup>1</sup>

Colonel Repington quotes in his diary an interview with Robertson at Queen Anne's Mansions: "He hopes the politicians will leave him alone and not expect him to take a part against Lord K., with whom he seems to get on very well . . . R. is dissatisfied with the Munitions Ministry against which Lord K. has been stirring him up." <sup>2</sup>

The consideration of this point has taken us rather far ahead. It is, however, significant that this very able and experienced Staff officer writing early in 1916, not only displays an admirable loyalty to his Chief and a steadfast refusal to take part in any unworthy intrigues against him, but expresses himself in phrases which form a most striking vindication of Lord Kitchener's judgment and military capacity. "*We owe more to him than anyone. Where would we be to-day but for the New Armies?*" Does not this indicate that the views in General Staff circles in 1916 had come round in many respects to those which Kitchener had held at the very beginning of the war? And that with a fuller knowledge of all the facts of the case most of the bitter criticisms against Kitchener, which had for the most part emanated from St. Omer, had been realized to have been unfair and unsound?

The short-sighted policy which led to practically every Staff officer who had had anything to do with our preparations for war being hurried off to the front with the Expeditionary Force did much more than leave Lord Kitchener with "aged and tired men who trembled before him and his reputation;" it resulted in a total breach in outlook

<sup>1</sup> *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *The First World War*, Vol. I, p. 116.

and in sentiment between the Secretary of State at home and G.H.Q. at the front. On the one hand there was the Secretary of State, of whom Sir Charles Callwell has written, "he was not in 1915 looking to 1916; he was looking to 1917, having made up his mind from the outset that this was to be a prolonged war of attrition." On the other hand there was G.H.Q. in France living in a world of illusion. Witness this: "We had not even then grasped the true effect and bearing of the many new elements which had entered into the practice of modern war. We fully believed we were driving the Germans back to the Meuse if not to the Rhine, and all my correspondence and communications at this time with Joffre and the French Generals most closely associated with me breathed the same spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the causes, it is a fact that Lord Kitchener, as Secretary of State for War during the most trying period of the struggle, not only did not receive the whole-hearted loyalty from the G.H.Q. which he might reasonably have expected, and which he afterwards received from Sir William Robertson, but he had to face a spirit of almost open intrigue against him. To G.H.Q. in France the tiny Expeditionary Force was everything. They had no vision of the millions of men into which this Force was destined to expand; they laughed at the project of the New Armies. The war, they imagined, would be over long before these came into line. Expeditions to the Dardanelles or other theatres of the war were anathema to them on the simple ground that they attracted men and munitions from France. That the enemy might conceivably be beaten by "finding a way round" was a policy in which they refused to believe. The narrow fields of France, the momentary necessities of the tiny forces actually present, the Russian "Steam-roller"

<sup>1</sup> French, 1914, p. 142. Dealing with the Battle of the Aisne.

which was to flatten everything in Germany, bounded all their vision. Thus we observe, in the early days of the war, an unfortunate divergence in doctrine and standpoint between the War Office and G.H.Q. in which the latter never hesitated to use unfair and disloyal methods against the Secretary of State for War. Lord Kitchener very properly held the Press at arm's length. Colonel Repington relates one interview which he had with him. After that, for whatever reason, Lord Kitchener steadily refused to see him again. G.H.Q. were less scrupulous in the matter of giving military information to the Press, colouring these *communiqués* to suit their own views. Thus the result of the divergence in standpoint and outlook between Lord Kitchener on the one hand, and Lord French and his Staff on the other—a divergence in which Lord Kitchener was wholly and absolutely in the right, and Lord French and his Staff were wholly and absolutely in the wrong—was a series of attacks upon Lord Kitchener in a certain section of the Press, attacks which grew more and more open as time passed, until they culminated in the celebrated article in the *Daily Mail* which led to that invaluable organ, as characterized by truth as by good taste, being publicly burnt on the Stock Exchange.

The consideration of the relations between the new Secretary of State for War, the General Staff as he found it, and G.H.Q. in France, has led us ahead in the narrative of events. Chief of the Imperial Staff at that time was Sir Charles Douglas, who had taken the post over from Sir John French, and who had accepted the ideas of his predecessor without question. In the presence of a Chief whose ideas were poles asunder from those of Sir John French, Sir Charles Douglas seems to have sunk into the position of a mere subordinate. Among other soldiers

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present at the War Office, Sir Charles Callwell, the Director of Military Operations, would seem to have entered into the closest association with Kitchener. The absence of men with whom he had worked in peace, and in whose judgment he could place confidence, unquestionably handicapped Lord Kitchener enormously. The responsibility for this, of course, rests with the Asquith Administration. They should not have left it to the very outbreak of the war to make up their minds as to whom they were going to put in supreme Military charge in event of hostilities. Kitchener should have been given the chance of gathering a selected staff of trusted subordinates around him.

On August 8th, 1914, Lord Kitchener issued his first call for 100,000. Within a fortnight he had obtained them. The difficulty was not to obtain recruits but to deal with them when obtained. No arrangements existed for the expansion of the Army. The recruits expected in any one year under the existing system had numbered 30,000. Within four weeks of the declaration of war 30,000 men attested in one day. Naturally machinery and personnel broke down hopelessly when one day would bring in that number. The War Office, under Lord Kitchener, however, responded with remarkable elasticity to the strain. No hesitation was shown in accepting offers of assistance from business-like civilians. Members of Parliament armed with a scrap of Lord Kitchener's handwriting rushed forth north, south, east and west to take the responsibility of doing unheard-of things quite contrary to the regulations. In one week, the fifth of the war, 175,000 men were enlisted for the Regular Army alone. Including the Territorial Force and those rejected, the total can have been little short of 250,000 men in that one week.

As might be expected, immense difficulties arose from this



sudden expansion. Preparations had been made beforehand for the pre-war establishment, and reserves of material had been accumulated. But these reserves were a mere drop in the ocean when it came to feeding, housing, clothing, equipping, arming, drilling and instructing these new units of, relatively, enormous numbers. The food was to be had indeed, but there was no organization for distributing it properly; there were no barracks, no huts, and not even enough tents for this host. The clothes, boots, and the dozens of special articles of equipment needed for all these soldiers, not to speak of their arms, would, under normal circumstances, have required years to manufacture, and even under the utmost pressure could not be produced at anything like the rate at which men were coming forward. As for drill and instruction, the difficulties were infinitely greater. There was an entire lack of guns, rifles, and all other ordnance stores. When the war started, the country possessed less than 800,000 rifles, of which little more than half were of the new short pattern, and many of these were in process of being re-sighted for the improved mark of ammunition. When the original Force mobilized on August 4th had been armed, there remained the authorized reserve of 150,000 rifles. That reserve would have met the wastage in the rifles of the Expeditionary Force alone, but was soon exhausted when drawn upon for the additional troops raised. When the war started the weekly output of rifles in the United Kingdom was under 2000, and though with night-shifts and full use of plant this number was considerably increased the amount turned out was infinitesimal compared with the needs of the New Armies. Unfortunately the rifle, though needed in larger quantities than any other weapon for an army, requires longer time than any other before its manufacture with new plant can

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be started, owing largely to the number of gauges of extreme accuracy required in the process ; consequently the recruits had to wait long.

We shall deal later with the Munitions shortage which has been placed, most unfairly, at the door of Kitchener. The above passages, taken in the main from an unbiased writer,<sup>1</sup> may serve to explain the chaos which confronted Kitchener when he began to raise the New Armies. It was a chaos due to the incredible lack of foresight shown by Lord Haldane and the Imperial General Staff. Yet attempts have not been lacking to state that Lord Kitchener reduced the War Office to a chaos by ignoring the scheme left behind him by Lord Haldane for establishing a National Army ! Lord Kitchener's methods at the War Office have also been made the subject of criticism. It has been placed on record that Sir Charles Douglas "chafed under K.'s disorganizing methods and his incurable habit of putting round men or things into square holes." But even Lord Esher who makes this statement tells us further on that "he" (Sir Charles) "could not realize that the vigorous push of this Herculean personality nine times out of ten squared the hole or rounded the object." It is a fact that Lord Kitchener cared nothing for the customary War Office routine. But whether this was exactly a defect in the man who created the New Armies is open to doubt. Lord Esher, whilst in general he consistently belittles Kitchener's work during the war, quotes an instance where he was himself concerned in which "what would have taken any other Secretary of State ever known or imagined days of reflection over piles of memoranda, possibly followed by the appointment of Committees of Investigation, was done at a flash by the ringing of a bell and a word of command."

<sup>1</sup> *Raising and Training the New Armies*, by Basil Williams.

Lord Esher would have us believe that this was a flash in the pan, a sort of last flicker of the old "Kitchener of Khartum, whom his political colleagues never saw." Having given this exhibition for Lord Esher's benefit, Kitchener, we are then asked to believe, sank into a sort of semi-senility. But Sir Charles Callwell, who came very much more into contact with Kitchener than Lord Esher had ever done, has given quite a different impression.

"Within the War Office itself he (Kitchener) certainly made things hum. In pre-war, plain-clothes days, those messengers of distinguished presence—dignity personified in their faultlessly-fitting official frock-coats and red waist-coats—had lent a tone of respectability to the precincts. . . . But although old hands will hardly credit it and may think I am romancing, I have seen those messengers tearing along the passages with coat-tails flying as though mad monkeys were at their heels, when Lord K. wanted somebody in his sanctum and had invited one of them to take the requisite steps. If the Chief happened to desire the presence of oneself, one did not run. Appearances had to be preserved. But one walked rather fast."<sup>1</sup> This is a picture which scarcely harmonizes with Lord Esher's theory of a Lord Kitchener sunk into a semi-senile decay. Lord Esher was Sub-Commissioner of the Red Cross in France, a post which, though no doubt useful, hardly entitles him to speak with authority upon the conduct of military operations. Sir Charles Callwell was Director of Military Operations at the War Office. It can hardly be doubted which writer is best in the position to pass an authoritative judgment upon so reserved and elusive a character as that of Lord Kitchener. What Lord Esher does not pause to consider, moreover, is that a Secretary of State for War who

<sup>1</sup> *Experiences of a Dug-Out*, p. 55.

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does "at a flash by the ringing of a bell and the word of command" what "would have taken any other Secretary of State ever known or imagined days of reflection over piles of memoranda, possibly followed by the appointment of Committees of Investigation," could scarcely achieve these results but by riding roughshod over War Office routine, treading heavily upon people's corns, and giving rise to a good deal of suppressed complaint and bitter resentments. Sir Charles Douglas we are told "chafed under Kitchener's disorganizing methods." But these were disorganizing methods which resulted that within an incredibly short space of time sixty divisions of well-trained, well-equipped troops, ten times as many as had been contemplated in the original Expeditionary Force, had been placed in line of battle in France. Kitchener's whirlwind methods, his impatience of excuses or of established routine, may have borne hardly upon personages trained to the leisurely go-as-you-please habits of the War Office in less critical days. But it is surely to show a strange lack of proportion to dwell upon the somewhat captious criticisms of these elderly if well-meaning gentlemen, in the fashion Lord Esher does. It can hardly be put to Lord Kitchener's discredit that in time of unparalleled emergency he took the War Office up and shook it vigorously from top to bottom, and made men who were earning substantial salaries *work*. Most people will be inclined to regret that the shaking up process did not come earlier.

It has seemed necessary to dwell upon the initial difficulties confronting Lord Kitchener, the fundamental differences in outlook and vision between the new Secretary of State for War and the General Staff officers who had been

responsible for the organization of the British Army for war and the preparation of schemes of attack and defence ; the friction which awaited Lord Kitchener at the War Office, and the hopeless chaos which prevailed with regard to Home Defence ; because all these were factors which very materially affected the subsequent conduct of Military operations. The public mind during the opening phases of the mighty struggle upon which we had entered, was filled with the tragic story of Mons and Le Cateau ; the march of events in France and Belgium, the heroic defence of Liège, the fall of Namur, the turn of the tide of German victory at the great Battle of the Marne, were mighty and spectacular feats of arms, amid the glow and enthusiasm of which men had no thought to question whether after all the best possible use had been made of our small forces ; whether perhaps after all Mons were not a tragic blunder, a second Balaclava in its useless heroism. Looking back upon the events of that fateful month of August 1914, in the light of what we now know, we may well feel disposed to regard the entire scheme of landing an army in France to assume a position upon the French left as a scheme fundamentally faulty. As we have seen, Lord Roberts at the meeting of the Cabinet on August 5th, inquired " whether it was not possible to base the British Army on Antwerp, so as to strike, in conjunction with the Belgian Armies, at the flank and rear of the invading German hosts." <sup>1</sup> There can be little question but that the daring genius and sure instinct of the aged Field-Marshal had seen into the heart of the problem at a glance. On the 20th of August the Belgian Army, six divisions plus one cavalry division, entered Antwerp practically intact. At almost the same date four British divisions, plus one of cavalry, con-

<sup>1</sup> *The World Crisis*, Vol. I, p. 232.

centrated between Mauberge and Le Cateau. Had the very considerable regular and semi-regular forces left behind been properly organized for Home Defence, there seems to be no real reason why the entire British Expeditionary Force, viz. : six divisions plus one of cavalry, should not have been landed in Antwerp where they would have combined with the Belgians, forming a total of twelve divisions plus two of cavalry. According to the British Official History of Military Operations, Kluck had left only two corps, viz. : the III Reserve Corps and IX Reserve Corps—four divisions, to observe Antwerp. We may assume that the Germans might have heard of the British landing, in which case they would have been obliged to detach two or three corps to deal with it, or, what is quite probable,<sup>1</sup> that it would have come as a surprise. In this case four German divisions would have stood against twelve British and Belgian, operating in a friendly country and in a position from which they would have threatened the entire communication of the German First and Second Armies at the very time when these were engaged in a difficult and dangerous flank march around the French left. In any case the threat to the German flank and rear could not have been ignored. On the very eve of the Battle of the Marne the much more distant menace of the Russians forced the Germans to detach two Army Corps to the east. They could hardly have detached less than two additional corps to deal with the threat from Antwerp. Thus the scheme suggested by Lord Roberts would have had the effect of diverting such strong forces from the German main armies as would at the very least have compensated for the lack of direct co-operation with the French Armies under Joffre. The Battle of

<sup>1</sup> Almost to the very date of Mons the Germans were ignorant that British troops were in front of them.

the Marne no doubt would have been fought and would have been a French victory, but the British Army would have been spared the retreat from Mons and the subsequent fall of Antwerp. Mr. Churchill's statement that the Fleet was not prepared to guarantee the communications of a force operating from Antwerp sounds extraordinary in view of the fact that a few weeks later such operations were actually undertaken, only in a hasty and ill-thought-out manner. All these are, of course, speculations. Yet it is fascinating to dwell upon what would have been the course of the war had the German retreat on the Aisne been carried out under menace of a powerful Anglo-Belgian force operating from Antwerp. It is fascinating, moreover, to dwell upon what would have been the effect of the large reinforcements of Regular troops from India, the Mediterranean, and South Africa if united in an Anglo-Belgian force acting independently. Certainly the Germans would have been pressed much harder.<sup>1</sup>

The decision to send the Expeditionary Force to France was taken the day before Kitchener became Secretary of State. No doubt he shares the responsibility. But he cannot be held responsible for the fact that the General Staff had not even drawn up plans for such an operation as Lord Roberts suggested. And it was this which clinched matters. At a time when the enemy was pouring into France and Belgium a bad plan whole-heartedly and energetically executed might conceivably lead to more concrete results than a better plan which would have led to delay. So the fateful decision was taken.

The general outline of the events which ensued, the advance of the British Expeditionary Force to Mons, the

<sup>1</sup> They would have had an enormously long line to defend.

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retreat subsequently and the Battle of Le Cateau, successfully fought by the Second Corps against overwhelming numbers, are events sufficiently well known to need but casual allusion. Yet a work dealing with Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War cannot ignore or pass over a most distressing and painful incident, an incident which it would have been more to the credit of the British Army to have left to silence had not Lord French brought it into indiscreet publicity in his work "1914."

On the 29th August, Lord Kitchener received a telegram from the Inspector-General of Communications, Rouen, informing him of a change of base from Rouen to Le Mans and the mouth of the Loire.

On the 30th, in reply to a request for an explanation, the Inspector-General of Communications telegraphed that he had been informed by G.H.Q. British Expeditionary Force that the Commander-in-Chief had decided to make a prolonged and definite retreat due south passing west or east of Paris.

On the same date Lord Kitchener telegraphed to Sir John French quoting the despatch sent by the Inspector-General of Communications, and adding, "I understood you would open a new base at St. Nazaire, but what is the meaning of above?"

On the 31st Sir John French answered that he had decided to retreat the following day behind the Seine, in a south-westerly direction west of Paris. He stated that his intention had been misunderstood by the Inspector-General. He had no idea of a prolonged and definite retreat.

Lord Kitchener replied immediately upon the same date :  
"I am surprised at your decision to retire behind the Seine. Please let me know, if you can, all your reasons for this move.



“What will be the effect of this course upon your relations with the French Army and on the general military situation? Will your retirement leave a gap in the French line or cause them discouragement of which the Germans might take advantage to carry out their first programme of first crushing the French and then being free to attack Russia?”

“Thirty-two trains of German troops were yesterday reported moving from the western field to meet the Russians. Have all your requirements been supplied by the Line of Communications and has your reorganization progressed?”

Again, also on the 31st, Lord Kitchener telegraphed:

“Your telegram No. F. 54 submitted to Cabinet. The Government are exceedingly anxious lest your force, at this stage of the campaign in particular, should, owing to your proposed retirement so far from the line, not be able to co-operate closely with our Allies and render them continuous support. They expect that you will, as far as possible, conform to the plans of General Joffre for the conduct of the campaign. They are waiting for the answer which you will no doubt send to my telegram of this morning, No. 767, and have all possible confidence in your troops and yourself.”

To this Sir John French, as he was then, replied:

“Your telegram No. 765 cipher. I have despatched by messenger, who left early this morning, a letter to you. I have explained in this at length the reasons for the course which I have taken. If the French go on with their present tactics, which are practically to fall back right and left of me, usually without notice, and to abandon all idea of offensive operations, of course, then, the gap in the French line will remain and the consequences must be borne by them.

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“ I can only state that it would be difficult for the force under my command to withstand successfully in its present condition a strong attack from even one German army corps, and in the event of a pause in my retirement, I must expect two army-corps at least, if not three. . . .”

On the day following, the 1st, he wired again to Lord Kitchener :

“ I hope you will understand quite clearly that in its present condition the force under my command is *unable to support our Allies effectively, whatever their position may be.*<sup>1</sup> It does not seem to be quite realized how shattered two divisions of my small force are, and how necessary it is even for the remainder to rest and refit. As long as we are in close contact with the enemy it is impossible to make things right. I have no definite idea of General Joffre’s general plan ; its general result is the advance of the Germans and the retreat of the Allies.

“ I feel quite sure that it is unnecessary to tell you that we will advance into the front line to-morrow and do our utmost, *if you choose to order it ;*<sup>2</sup> but I am sure the result of this would be grave disaster to the French troops. I could never hope to extricate them as I extricated them before. We have all been greatly encouraged by your words, and I am deeply grateful for the confidence which you express in me and in my troops. If, however, I failed to make our position perfectly clear to you, I should be culpably wanting in my duty.”

To this, Kitchener replied at once :

“ Has a message from the President of the French Republic about your leaving the French line reached you yet ?

“ The result of this may be serious to the French Army and we feel that you should call on your troops for an effort.

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

<sup>2</sup> My italics.

I am coming to see you this morning to talk over the situation, as I find it very difficult to judge. Please send a telegram to the Embassy at Paris immediately, stating where we can most conveniently meet."

The telegraphic correspondence between Lord Kitchener and Sir John French, the Field-Marshal commanding the B.E.F., had filled the Cabinet with justifiable alarm. Sir John French, as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had been the man above all others who had staked his military reputation upon the prompt and unflinching support of France, the man above all others who had denuded England of organized mobile troops and rendered almost impossible the organization of new troops by insisting that everything should be taken with the Expeditionary Force. This was the man who now at the critical moment was proposing to leave our French Allies in the lurch and who was writing of Joffre in terms which could hardly be taken as implying that close and cordial co-operation without which success in the coming operations was scarcely to be anticipated. Under the circumstances, Lord Kitchener received the unanimous request of the Cabinet to go over to France and clear the situation up.

Thus, there came about the celebrated interview between Lord Kitchener and French, about which the latter would seem to write with calculated venom, thus :

" Lord Kitchener arrived on this occasion in the uniform of a Field-Marshal, and from the outset of his conversation assumed the air of a Commander-in-Chief and announced his intention of taking the field and inspecting the troops."

Now in this connection it is well to recall the phrase in Lord French's telegram received by Kitchener on the morning of the day upon which the interview took place and already quoted, viz. : " I feel quite sure that it is un-

necessary to tell you that we will advance into the front line to-morrow and do our utmost *if you choose to order it.*"<sup>1</sup> Here we have French very definitely throwing all responsibility for an advance upon Kitchener. Moreover the expression used is that of a subordinate commander to his superior. It occurred in a telegram addressed to Earl Kitchener who was not only Secretary of State for War, but a Field-Marshal on the active list, senior to Sir John French. That French, having thrown the responsibility to stand and fight entirely upon Kitchener, having announced his willingness to accept this latter's orders upon a purely military and executive problem, should take it amiss that Kitchener should arrive in Paris in the uniform of a Field-Marshal and express his intention of inspecting the troops in the field (whom Kitchener was to take the responsibility of ordering to advance into the front line), is surely somewhat extraordinary! French had practically invited Kitchener to do all these things. Nor does Lord French's story of what took place at this interview appear to be at all reconcilable with facts. He tells us "The interview had one important result. M. Millerand (the War Minister) and M. Viviani (the Prime Minister) were present at the Conference, and before them all I was able to give a clear exposition of my views as to the future conduct of the Allied operations."<sup>2</sup>

Lord French would have us believe that Lord Kitchener's intervention had no influence upon his military judgment; that his decision to stay his retreat and to turn and fight, was the result of a well-thought-out, deeply conceived scheme of operations. Yet upon the very same morning he had sent Lord Kitchener the telegram already quoted, but which he does not publish in 1914, viz.: "I hope you

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

<sup>2</sup> 1914, p. 96.

will understand quite clearly that in its present condition the force under my command is *unable to support our Allies effectively, whatever their position may be.*" And on the day preceding he had wired that his force would find it difficult to withstand "a strong attack from even one German army corps"! How in the world it is possible to reconcile the messages of despair sent in these telegrams with an elaborate, well-thought-out scheme of retirement to fight, as claimed by Lord French when writing many years subsequently, is difficult to conceive. Not even Lord Esher is able to stomach the story told by French in 1914. "M. Poincaré's view that the 'misunderstanding was then very serious,' and that its removal was due 'for the most part to Lord Kitchener,' although it is not reconcilable with Sir John French's account of these episodes, has never been questioned in England or in France by anyone who was aware of what passed during those critical hours, and Lord Kitchener is entitled to a prominent place among those who contributed to the success of Joffre in the Battle of the Marne."<sup>1</sup> So much Lord Esher. But when we analyse the story told by French in 1914 further, we come upon yet more extraordinary discrepancies. Lord French on page 99 of his book tells us that Lord Kitchener took exception to certain views which he (Lord French) expressed and called him aside to another room and objected strongly to the tone he had assumed. Upon this, writes French, "I told him all that was in my mind." He goes on to describe how he read Lord Kitchener a lecture upon the danger of interfering with a commander in the field and claims to have told Kitchener that he would not tolerate any interference with his executive command. Yet Lord French quotes in the preface to the second

<sup>1</sup> *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 47.

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edition of his book, a letter from Kitchener written with his own hand upon War Office Notepaper :

“WAR OFFICE,  
“WHITEHALL, S.W.,  
“7.30 P.M., 1st September.

“MY DEAR FRENCH,

“After thinking over our conversation of to-day, I think I am giving the sense of it in the following telegram to Government I have just sent :

“‘French’s troops are now engaged in the fighting line where he will remain conforming to the movements of the French Army though at the same time acting with caution to avoid being in any way unsupported on his flanks.’

“I feel sure you will agree that the above represents the conclusions we came to ; but, in any case, until I can communicate with you further in answer to anything you may wish to tell me, *please consider it as an instruction.*<sup>1</sup>

“By being in the fighting line you will, of course, understand I mean dispositions of your troops in contact with, though possibly behind the French as they were to-day ; of course you will judge as regards your position in this respect.”

Now if there is one thing clear about this letter, it is that it contradicts in a very absolute and definite fashion, the story told by Lord French in the text. It makes it clear that the scheme of operations submitted the same day to General Joffre by French, and for which French claims the sole credit, was in reality drawn up after close consultation with Lord Kitchener and under the influence of his masterful personality. How otherwise, indeed, can we explain the contrast between the despairing telegrams of the morning

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

and the decision to undertake offensive operations in the evening? How otherwise can we explain the contrast in the mental outlook of a commander who in the morning expresses himself as "unable to support our Allies effectively, whatever their position may be"; and in the evening actually prepares plans for such support, than by the sharp decided intervention of Lord Kitchener? And in view of Lord French's claim, made years after the event, to have read Lord Kitchener a species of lecture, and to have told him that he (Lord French) would not tolerate any interference with his executive command, it is interesting to note the very clear and decided manner in which Kitchener writes referring to the operations outlined in the letter, "in any case . . . please consider it as an instruction." There is no hint here that French had warned Kitchener that he would not tolerate any interference with his executive command. On the contrary, the letter, whilst courteously expressed, is uncompromisingly firm upon the essential points at issue. It is so worded as to rule out the least possibility of misunderstanding. May one surmise that if French had ventured any protest at all as to Lord Kitchener's interference in his executive command, he had expressed himself in a very much milder tone than he claimed to have used, when writing of the event many years subsequently? In fact that he had expressed himself so mildly that Kitchener scarcely noticed it? From the fact that Colonel Repington in his Diary for November 23rd, 1914, notes that French was "greatly enraged at the constant interference of Lord K. with the operations," it would not seem that Lord Kitchener had taken anything said to him by French on this subject very seriously.

Anyhow, it can hardly be disputed that Lord Kitchener's intervention saved the Allies from a great and irreparable

disaster, that, in the words of Mr. Asquith, it saved the name of Great Britain from "indelible reproach." Lord French's narrative of events may fairly be described as characterized by general muddle-headedness and the suppression of important evidence. It may not be without interest in this connection to consider what would have happened had the Battle of the Marne proved a disaster instead of a victory. Should we *then* have had Lord French claiming the sole credit for the scheme of operations adopted? Should we not rather have found him solemnly quoting the telegrams which he has since chosen conveniently to ignore, as evidence that he had all along been opposed to such operations, and had foretold that they would end in disaster? As Lord Kitchener in that case would have been given the whole credit for the defeat it seems hardly fair to deprive him of the credit for the victory.

But the incident had one unfortunate working in that it deepened the gulf which had already been opening between French and Kitchener. The latter's intervention obliging him to participate in a victory in spite of himself was a wound to French's vanity which he neither forgot nor forgave. Until subsequently relieved of his command upon the thinly veiled ground of incapacity, he never ceased to give aid and encouragement to a malicious campaign directed against the Secretary of State for War, and in the Northcliffe Press he found an only too willing and effective instrument to gratify feelings which, however much he may have deluded himself into the belief that they arose from regard to public interest, must truly be ascribed to less worthy motives.



## CHAPTER III

### THE WORK OF EXPANSION AND OF REPLACEMENT

**T**HE popular mind filled with the bloody drama of the Marne, Antwerp, and the Dardanelles, has hardly devoted sufficient attention to the immense work of expansion which went on at home. There was the electric thrill of war in the air. The public, listening for the sound of guns, hardly realized that it was in England herself during those fateful months that the war was being decided; that it was the crowds of ill-armed, ill-trained volunteers, transforming themselves under circumstances of infinite difficulty into great armies that were really to play the decisive rôle upon the battlefields of Europe. The people responded generously and whole-heartedly to the call to arms. But the Press found little of spectacular interest in the arduous process of training and organization. Nor, had they wished to do so, would it really have been particularly desirable to have published long and intimate descriptions of the new units in process of fitting themselves to partake in the titanic conflict. Thus the work of raising the new armies went on in comparative silence amid the thunder of war, and the public heard a good deal of captious criticisms, a good deal of comment over this or that reported failure of the War Office. But singularly little was heard

about the constructive work actually in progress. This is exemplified to a remarkable degree by the histories of the war. We hear much of Antwerp, the Dardanelles and Neuve Chapelle, much about the doings of the Russians and French, yet the silent passage of division upon division of the new armies from England to the armies in the field is mentioned but casually and almost as a matter of course. And yet in point of fact, the expansion of the British army until from a tiny professional force it developed into an army which in strength and striking power, equalled if it did not exceed, that of the great military nation with whom we were allied, is one of the most marvellous feats in all history, it was a feat to which, next to the British Navy, was due the ultimate victory of the Allies.

Who shall describe the mighty impulse which sent the manhood of Great Britain flocking to arms? Who shall describe the wave of thrilling patriotism which swept through the English race when the call went out to join Kitchener's armies? We should need to borrow the pen of a Shakespeare, to produce words equal to those immortal lines:

"Now all the youth of England are on fire,  
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies,"

in which the greatest poet of our race sings of the exploits of one of our most martial kings.

We now know that the British Government whilst talking peace had long dallied with the thought of War with Germany. For years before the crisis the General Staffs of England and of France had been occupied in schemes for mutual attack and defence against the might of the Teutonic Power. But the broad masses of the public in 1914 realized little of these things. They saw only Belgium trampled underfoot, an innocent victim, by a ruthless invader. They

saw France with her fairest provinces in the hands of a cruel and relentless foe. It was with no impulse of cold calculation that the manhood of England and of her Colonies sprang to arms, it was with no nice weighing up of political or economic advantages. It was a fair and noble impulse which sent these millions of armed men voluntarily into the field, an impulse of generous chivalry to protect the weak and helpless, an impulse to defend unarmed Right against armed Might. The very flower of England came forth in answer to the call.

The problem which confronted Lord Kitchener when he became Secretary of State for War was of extraordinary complexity. It may roughly be defined as *Replacement* and *Expansion*. Replacement was the business of furnishing drafts to units in the field. The original Expeditionary Force for instance sustained severe losses in the first few weeks' fighting. The Second Corps alone in the retreat from Mons and the battle of Le Cateau lost 7,182 men and 38 guns. The B.E.F. on the 5th of September was some 20,000 men and 40 guns short of strength. All these were losses which required a steady stream of new drafts and units for the fighting line. In this respect Kitchener showed almost the skill of a juggler.

Mr. Churchill writes: "My military staff-officer, Major Ollivant, at this stage had a very good idea which provoked immediately far-reaching consequences. He advised me to ask Lord Kitchener for a dozen batteries from India to form the artillery of the Royal Naval Division, letting India have Territorial batteries in exchange. I put this to Lord Kitchener the same afternoon. He seemed tremendously struck by the idea. . . . Forty-eight hours later, when I returned, I visited Lord Kitchener and asked him how matters were progressing. . . . 'Not only,' he said,

'am I going to take twelve batteries but thirty-one, and not only am I going to take batteries, I am going to take battalions. I am going to take thirty-nine battalions: I am going to send them Territorial divisions instead—three Territorial divisions. You must get the Transport ready at once.'"<sup>1</sup> There were thus formed the Eighth, Twenty-Seventh and Twenty-Eighth divisions, which joined the B.E.F. in France November-December 1914, and January 1915, respectively. The Twenty-Ninth division also from India, as is well known, took part in the Dardanelles expedition. By the end of August the Seventh Division had also been formed by bringing troops from various overseas Garrisons, two divisions of British-Indian troops<sup>2</sup> had been sent to France, thus the B.E.F. had been brought by January 1915 up to an establishment of more than twice its original strength.<sup>3</sup> And these, it must be remembered, were not hastily raised improvised formations, but long-service regular troops. Meanwhile, at home, the work of expansion had gone on apace.

The greatest difficulty was of course the provision of officers and N.C.O.'s for the new formations. Various expedients were adopted to deal with this.

The regular officers seized upon by Kitchener in face of French's bitter protests, and surplus at the depots proved of utmost use in commanding the new service battalions. As far as possible it was attempted to have at least one experienced officer to every new unit. Some hundreds of officers of the Indian army home on leave, were retained for training purposes and proved of immense assistance in the early days of the war. Retired officers, "dug-outs" as

<sup>1</sup> *The World Crisis*, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> Native troops.

<sup>3</sup> Not to speak of 73 Territorial battalions and several regiments of Yeomanry.

they became popularly termed, were appointed in large numbers. In the great dearth of experienced officers they played a great rôle in the training of recruits, and many of them proved to be excellent officers in all respects. But some were too old or were otherwise unfit for service even at home. Captain Basil Williams quotes the case of one second-in-command of a battalion, who was fifty-five years old, and who had to use a chair to mount his horse. Yet this officer is reported to have been very keen and of great use in training his men. Others, however, were not only not up-to-date, but lacked the capacity to make themselves so. This was a serious disability in view of the immense changes in drill and tactics introduced into the army after 1909 and which were unfamiliar even to officers who had left the army quite recently. Many civilians over the age of twenty-five were given commissions direct without any special training, especially in technical corps such as engineers, etc., for which their civilian professions had fitted them. Wounded officers from the front also performed invaluable work for training purposes in the interim before they had recovered sufficiently to rejoin their units in the field. Their experience of the realities of war plus their high technical training made them specially fitted for such purposes.

Although one of Kitchener's most useful measures was to greatly increase the establishments at Woolwich and Sandhurst, introduce shorter courses of training and to raise the age of entry from nineteen and a half to twenty-five, thus quadrupling the yearly output of regular officers, the casualties in the regular commissioned ranks were so great, that the officers produced by these sources were for the most part required for the old battalions.

A certain number of ex-warrant and non-commissioned

officers were given commissions and on the whole were exceedingly valuable, especially in the early stages of training. In many cases such officers obtained the rank of Lieutenant or Captain and fully justified their promotion.

All these were regular commissions. The great and immediate need was still to get officers for the thousands of recruits pouring in daily to form the new service battalions. It was decided, in view of the urgency of the occasion, to grant "temporary commissions" to young men otherwise suitable but without the full training normally required. Here the Officers' Training Corps established by Lord Haldane were of undoubted value. There were two categories of this corps, the Senior being Territorial units attached to the Universities and Inns of Court, the Junior, cadet units composed of boys under education at the Public Schools. All told, there were twenty-two units of the Senior division, and over a hundred of the Junior division. The training differed very considerably in the various units, some being excellent and others very poor. But they provided a very large number of youths and men who had at least a general idea of military training and the elements of discipline. In view of the statement so often put forward that Kitchener knew nothing of the Territorial scheme, that it was difficult to persuade him to accept the offers of service at the front made by Territorial units, that he ignored Lord Haldane's scheme for a future national army, etc., etc., the alacrity with which he seized upon the Officers' Training Corps and incorporated it into his own scheme, is worthy of comment. We have seen him showing the same alacrity in seizing upon ideas which seemed to him to be sound in the case of the suggestion made to him to withdraw regular batteries from India and to replace them by Territorials. In this case he not only snatched

at the idea, but developed it into a far more daring and useful conception. We observe that Kitchener never had the least hesitation in seizing upon anything in the Territorial scheme which seemed to him to be really useful.

It is, however, significant of the more limited views of Lord Haldane that the O.T.C., whilst they did good service, were far from producing a sufficient number of officers to deal with our requirements. Temporary commissions were granted in large numbers to University men and Public School boys who had done no O.T.C. training. Among the best sources for junior officers for the new armies, were the number of young men settled in the colonies or in foreign countries, and who flocked back to the "Mother Country" to offer their services.

Officers for the technical corps such as the R.E., the A.S.C., the R.A.M.C., the A.O.C., Pioneer Battalions, and to a certain extent the R.A., were selected with care by the War Office and after consultation with the heads of the corresponding civil professions. Thus for the R.E., Officer-candidates for field-units were recommended by the President of the Institution of Civil Engineers, and by the Universities; for the railway companies, candidates were nominated by the principal railway companies at home and abroad; tunnelling companies of the R.E. had their officers largely selected by the Mining Institutions of Great Britain. For the A.S.C. the Institute of Chartered Accountants and of Civil Engineers, and large business firms were asked to recommend candidates.

From these various sources the first and second of the new armies received officers of excellent type who shook down into their new duties with amazing rapidity. The third and fourth armies were at first not so fortunate. The nucleus of regular officers, although thinly spread, had been

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used up ; and the best of the young men available from the Universities, the Public schools and the Professions, were no longer so easily obtained. Other means of obtaining excellent officers were discovered subsequently.

The "Pals" battalions, to which we shall refer again, were in general not quite up to the standard of the line, as regards their officers. Great latitude was given to the raisers of these battalions in the appointment of officers ; this led to many irregularities, whilst the employment of local men limited the field of choice.

The N.C.O.'s of the new armies were at first a great source of weakness. Although the War Office encouraged by every means in its power the re-enlistment of ex-warrant Officers and N.C.O.'s, as well as discharged soldiers up to the age of fifty, to help in training, the numbers obtained were too few to form strong enough *cadres*. During the whole of the first year of the new armies hardly any attempt could be made to systematize and organize the training of N.C.O.'s. It was not until July 1915 that the first school for training N.C.O.'s was opened, and it was not until February 1916 that the Army Council decided to increase the number of these training centres.

Very many of the newly appointed officers were also lacking in any form of military training. On the 17th of August 1914, classes of instruction were organized for young officers at six training centres under senior officers of the O.T.C., to which junior officers granted temporary commissions could be sent for a month before taking up their duties. But even this short period of training had to be suspended during the whole of 1914, as it would have entailed leaving the new formations with hardly any sub-alterns. Early in 1915 the system of a month's training for new officers was revived and extended, so that 2610 officers



a month could get some instruction before joining their units. One month's training was obviously very little, but at the time it was the utmost that could be done. Gradually as the war progressed the training of officers became more systematized. Early in 1915 there were formed Young Officers' Companies in the Reserve Brigades. These Young Officers' Companies were later concentrated into groups under capable officers. Finally in February 1916, there were introduced the Cadet Battalions which practically solved the difficulties with regard to a supply of trained officers, and which, apart from providing a short but intensive period of training, afforded a means of sifting out undesirable elements.

So far as the organization of the new armies was concerned this was in general, as said, by grafting new "Service" battalions on to existing regiments. Lord Kitchener, always eager to do anything likely to help recruiting, with his customary disregard of precedents sanctioned at a quite early stage, the formations of "Pals" Battalions, to be raised locally from men who knew one another in their own districts. Liverpool seems to have made the start with these "Pals" battalions, four battalions being raised within three days. The Tyneside showed similar enthusiasm, four battalions being raised between October 23rd, and November 18th. "Bantams" battalions were also raised of men underneath the regulation height. Eventually an entire division of the new army was made up of these men. Altogether excluding Wales, 172 "Pals" and "Bantams" battalions were raised, besides 84 units of Artillery and 48 of Engineers.

The Third New Army was formed of battalions raised in the districts where recruiting was best. After the first three armies were completed, further recruits were posted

to reserve battalions ; as soon as any of these reserve battalions attained a strength of 2700 men, e.g., equal to the establishment of *three* normal line battalions, a new battalion was drawn from it. This brings us to criticism often made against Kitchener : that he "piled up" the divisions of the new army without establishing proper reserves behind them. The system adopted provided for 1800 reserves = 2 normal battalions for 3600 men = 4 normal battalions, i.e. for every two battalions in the field there was the equivalent of one depot battalion. This at the beginning of the war seemed sufficient.<sup>1</sup> When later casualties were unexpectedly heavy, the Fourth Army which had been formed from the extra battalions drawn from the reserve units, was reconverted into reserve battalions known as second-reserve battalions and used for drafting. This brought the proportion to the equivalent of one depot battalion for every battalion in the field. Not the least remarkable feature of the scheme of organization introduced by Kitchener was its extraordinary flexibility. As we have seen, battalions could be used almost indifferently whether for drafting or for reinforcing as units. The second line Territorials were also used for a considerable time for drafting purposes and then sent as units to the front. This is a fact which brings home to us the initial mistake made in failing to organize the Special Reserve battalions into divisions at the outbreak of the war. They could have furnished drafts just as well if organized into mobile formations.

After the Fourth New Army had been reconverted into reserve battalions, a new Fourth Army and a Fifth Army were constituted about the middle of July from the locally-raised battalions.

<sup>1</sup> Before the war recognized authorities had urged such a 3-battalion system.

The Territorial Force which had rapidly expanded in numbers after the declaration of war also raised second line units which, as said, were at first used to find drafts. Ultimately third line units were raised for drafting purposes and the second line were formed into divisions and sent abroad. The proportion of one battalion at home to two abroad, however, proved insufficient, and the Territorial divisions showed a tendency to dwindle away.

During 1915 an average number of over a million troops were being trained in the United Kingdom, apart from the Armies fighting on the different fronts. This training was carried on under circumstances of infinite difficulty. The first three armies enjoyed certain advantages over the others, each of their divisions being concentrated on one training ground, and a small percentage of regular officers being available. It was thus possible to follow a definite system of training, towards the end of which the divisions of one army could be brought together to one centre, so that they had the opportunity of combined training for a short period before being sent overseas.

The local battalions of the Fourth and Fifth New Armies and the second line Territorial Battalions were not so fortunate. For long they had to do their training billeted in the district where they were raised, or in isolated camps and were rarely collected into divisions until the first three armies had completed their training and left the country. By pressing the existing barrack accommodation to the utmost, quarters could not be found for more than 767,000 men. Others had to be put in tents, schools, other public institutions or in specially-hired houses. Billeting was utilized upon a gigantic scale, some 800,000 men being distributed in this fashion among private houses. This involved scattering the men sometimes over a wide area

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with corresponding difficulties in collecting and training them.

On August 14th, 1914, Lord Kitchener approved of plans for hutments to take half a million men. Later the programme was increased to take nearly a million, besides remount establishments, aeroplane sheds, hospital huts and rifle ranges. For this vast programme great difficulties had to be encountered in obtaining timber and other requisites, labour and an adequate inspection staff. Water had to be laid on to the camps besides gas or electric light, drainage and sanitation had to be provided for. Roads had to be repaired and sometimes new ones built to provide for the passages of heavy waggons with stores for all these purposes. Within a year in spite of all these difficulties hutments had been erected to accommodate 750,000 men. It was not, however, until well into 1916 that the problem had been completely solved.

An Army Order published soon after the declaration of war laid down the general conditions for training. Courses of six months were provided for all arms, three months being for the recruit stage. Drastic "cuts" were made in the procedure usually followed, everything not absolutely necessary being eliminated. Training, however, was seriously hampered by the general shortage of arms and equipment. Up till January 1915 the First New Army had only 400 Service Rifles per battalion and the Second had only 100. The Third and Fourth Armies were even worse off. Rifle drill and musketry had to be taught by passing round the few rifles available from hand to hand, and by using worn-out rifles for drill purposes. The Artillery were even worse off than the Infantry. The outbreak of the war found us with guns enough to equip eight divisions plus a small reserve for wastage. Our normal requirements were

so small that we had no means of immediately accelerating the supply, the plant laid down in the Government factory and in the few private firms was only calculated for the normal supply. The War Office took immediate steps to increase the production by all possible means ; laying down extra plant in their own factory and encouraging the private firms to do the same. But even so the demand from the various fronts was so great that the War Office could barely cope with it. The development of the trench war led to unprecedented demands for artillery of all calibres, thus the supply of artillery for the armies in training in the United Kingdom lagged far behind. In October 1914 one division of the new army had only six 18-pdrs. instead of fifty-four ; another had only a few obsolete 15-pdrs. ; in March 1915 some divisions had only two guns per battery and even in May when the full complement of guns for the first new army divisions had arrived, the equipment of dial-sights, etc., for indirect laying was still deficient. The second new army was at that date in much the same condition, and was short of its entire complement of Howitzers. The Third and Fourth armies were worse off still.

In the case of so technical and difficult an arm as artillery, these shortages seriously handicapped training. Dummy wooden guns were made or purchased by enthusiastic officers, with which to teach the elements of gun-drill. But the absence of dial-sights, range-finders, directors, etc., without which a modern battery is almost helpless, was a difficulty calculated to baffle the most ingenious. Horses, harness, and proper waggons were hardly ever complete for any battery of the first three armies until on the very eve of their departure overseas.

The general shortage of equipment, the deficiencies in camps and quarters, rifle-ranges and all the established

mechanism for raising and training armies made it difficult for commanding officers in general to adhere to the scheme of training laid down by the War Office. Conditions varied very greatly from battalion to battalion.

During this period officers and N.C.O.'s in general had to learn their business as best they could in their battalions. There were a few short courses in special subjects, such as signalling, musketry and physical training. In general, special training was given by lectures and regimental tours by energetic seniors. Officers newly appointed to the R.A., before joining their batteries, were generally sent to one of the twelve reserve brigades established for training purposes, and then for a month to Shoeburyness or to Larkhill. Engineer-Officers went for a seven weeks' course to Chatham.

The general results of this brief and disturbed period of training were, however, amazing. The First New Army was sent to the front after nine months of embodiment closely followed by the Second and Third. Even divisions of the Fourth and Fifth Armies which had to cope with special difficulties in the way of training were fit to go to the front within a year. None of them did badly. "The secret of this great triumph over difficulties," writes Captain Basil Williams, "lies chiefly in the magnificent spirit of all ranks. In these great voluntary armies not a man held a commission or served in the ranks, but that he felt it his duty to fight for a just cause and had a love for his country which spurred him on to fight worthily for her and that cause. . . .<sup>1</sup> There was everywhere a jolly determination to overcome difficulties somehow and to get on with the work. In spite of the hardship there was no grumbling and no serious crime. When the equipment necessary for

<sup>1</sup> *Raising and Training the New Armies*, p. 79.

training could not be obtained from the hard-beset War Office, the new armies did not sit down helplessly and give it up; they set to work improvising, borrowing or buying articles urgently required. Harness and saddlery would be lent by owners of stables in the neighbourhood of a camp, dummy guns were made by a carpenter in the battery, rough dial-sights were manufactured by ingenious subalterns, flags for semaphore work were made by the men themselves; the officers clubbed together to buy a telephone-set or field-compass or any rifles they could find on the market for their own and their men's instruction."

We may well marvel at the ignorance and folly of those knights of the Northcliffe Press, among them so-called "military experts," who should have known better, who did not hesitate to assail Lord Kitchener with abuse for not having, under circumstances like these, introduced conscription. Exactly how these people proposed to control and to keep in the ranks men who would not come forward voluntarily, at a time when, for lack of quarters, 800,000 men had to be billeted in private houses; exactly how they proposed to train *unwilling* men amid the paucity of rifles, instructors, and equipment of every kind, are points upon which none of these wiseacres condescend to enlighten us. It has been asserted, very solemnly, that the voluntary system was unfair, that it took the very cream of the nation's manhood and left the rest at home. But is it not apparent that under the circumstances which existed, circumstances for which Lord Kitchener in no way bears the responsibility, only the very cream of the nation's manhood could have made themselves into an efficient army? Had all the existing advantages been complicated by introducing a large proportion of half-hearted and unwilling men, we should have had the country covered by streams

of deserters spreading demoralization around them, as actually happened in the Southern States during the American Civil War, whilst it would have taken a very much longer time to train the staunch men remaining.

All this is not to say that later on the war could have been maintained without compulsory service ; but compulsory service introduced when strong and well-trained *cadres* had been brought into existence to receive recruits ; when the Derby system had further been established to control and regulate the flow of recruits, was a very different thing to compulsory service rushed upon the country before the national mind had been prepared on the subject or the requisite machinery had been established.

Putting a law upon the statutes in itself means nothing. It is the police and the machinery for detection of breaches of such a law, and the punishment thereof, which renders this effective. Nor can even the police and the machinery for detection and punishment suffice in themselves, unless backed by the force of an intelligent and well-informed public opinion. It is not generally realized that the Derby system was a necessary preliminary to the actual practice of conscription. There had been lacking hitherto the machinery for making a law of conscription effective. Upon the continent of Europe, even in countries such as Switzerland, which did not maintain great armies, there existed a system of police registration and control such as English public opinion would have tolerated but in dire emergency. A Swiss subject, man or woman, could not change his abode from one street to another, without notifying the police. Exact statistics existed as to the age and occupation of every man, woman, or child. England in 1914 had none of these things. Yet they were the essential preliminaries to conscription. Without them it



would have been impossible to "rope in" men who did not wish to come.

In estimating the real services performed by Kitchener, it should never be forgotten that the problem which he faced differed in most material degree from that which had faced any other organizer. In the American Civil War both sides started under analogous disadvantages. The American regular army numbered only 16,000 men scattered in small garrisons all over the vast territories of the American Union. Both sides were dependent upon hastily raised levies of volunteers lacking in Military knowledge or training. The South, whilst she early resorted to conscription, found her laws for compulsory service, whilst on paper very strict, in practice largely a dead letter. The glorious deeds of the troops led by Lee and Stonewall Jackson should not blind us to the fact that their armies were thinned by desertion to a quite phenomenal extent. It may in fact be said that the Southern conscripts filtered through the ranks almost like water through a sieve. The magnificent deeds done by the Army of Northern Virginia were achieved by men whose hearts were in their work, and who remained voluntarily with their regiments. The vast regions of the Southern States, the absence of any system of police registration and control, rendered it impossible, in practice, to retain with the colours men who did not wish to fight.<sup>1</sup> Compulsory service, introduced into the Northern States two years later, in a partial and unfair manner, produced only 100,000 men out of a population of about 30,000,000. But, in any case, in respect to military qualifications, both sides started on a fairly even footing. If the North had a greater population and greater industrial resources, the South had on the whole, more able officers occupying

<sup>1</sup> Bands of deserters perpetrated terrible atrocities.

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responsible positions, and a population habituated to the use of arms. But the problem before Lord Kitchener was to raise armies not to fight against similarly hastily-organized armies, but to fight against the most highly-trained troops in Europe. The new armies were to be pitted against a "military organization as complex in character as it is perfect in machinery," an army which had inherited the traditions of the great Moltke and which had for forty years been burnishing up its harness, and keying up its military effort to reach the highest level compatible with human ingenuity and human foresight. That Lord Kitchener in the short time available to him, under all the disadvantages outlined above, should have been successful in producing armies capable of meeting these highly-trained and highly-organized German troops upon equal terms, is one of the marvels of military history. It was a miracle which the leaders of the German armies declared to be impossible. Von Hindenburg in an interview published in the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, spoke scoffingly of the Kitchener armies. "He can get the *men* no doubt, and Englishmen are brave enough, but where can he get the officers? That's the rub. You can train a man in six months into a fairly efficient soldier, but it takes six *years* to train an officer." Innumerable other leading German military authorities could be cited in a similar sense. German soldiers occupying responsible positions, and whose opinions would have been accepted before the war as authoritative throughout the world, ridiculed the idea. Nor were the Germans the only experts who held these views. Mr. Churchill tells of a visit which he paid to Sir John French at the front at this time. "Fierce were the reproaches that the War Office were withholding vitally needed officers, instructors and material for the purpose of

training vast armies that would never be ready in time.”<sup>1</sup> It was not until the battle of the Somme that the Germans publicly changed their tune and the Prussian Minister of War, Von Stein, declared to the Reichstag, “Our most formidable enemies are the English. They always come anew to the attack and continually use more formidable methods of war.” But as far back as Loos the German Officers and soldiers had ceased to speak in would-be contempt of the new armies.

Finally, in view of the grotesque charges brought by writers such as Colonel Repington, against Kitchener, as having introduced “disorganization” into the British Army, it may be well to quote the words of an experienced General, who, recalling the pre-war days at Aldershot, when two divisions less one brigade strained the resources of the staff to the full, writing in April 1915, reported that there were five divisions all working smoothly under no larger a staff and with less fuss and bother made about all these divisions with all their *impedimenta* working in the field, than was made before over an ordinary field-day. The same General declared with regard to the training of some of these divisions that a mass of civilians had been transformed within less than eight months into an army which had had more practical training for war than it had ever been possible to give the troops in England before.

In concluding this chapter it may not be without interest to make some comparisons between the military effort put forward by the United States in raising her new armies and that of the British Empire.

The United States upon coming into the war, immediately passed a law for universal compulsory military service. Under this law she raised between May 18th, 1917, and

<sup>1</sup> *The World Crisis*, Vol. I, p. 281.

November 1st, 1918, a grand total of 3,483,444 men, excluding officers but including coloured troops. The British Empire during a similar period of eighteen months, raised by *voluntary* service, well over 4,000,000 men, of whom 2,632,682 were enlisted in the United Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> the remainder from India and the various Dominions and Colonies. If the figures for the United Kingdom are taken alone and compared with those of the United States, which has more than double the population, they indicate that, in proportion to population, roughly speaking twice as many men *volunteered* for service in the United Kingdom as were *conscripted* in the United States. Up to the month of October 1915 there had been enlisted by Lord Kitchener direct as Secretary of State for War, 2,389,772 men within the United Kingdom alone, excluding the Dominions, Dependencies and Colonies ; a proportion roughly speaking twice as high as the numbers obtained in a similar period of time by the United States under compulsory service. Within the period from May 18th, 1917 to November 1st, the United States put twenty-four combatant divisions, by which is meant divisions actually available for the front line, into the field. Within the same period of time, excluding the magnificent Australian, Canadian and Indian divisions, and counting only troops actually embarked for combatant service, the United Kingdom placed *fifty-four* divisions in the field. All this is not meant to in any way belittle or to disparage the magnificent work done by the United States. It is merely to place the work done by Lord Kitchener in proper perspective. And that even now the magnitude of the feat accomplished by Lord Kitchener has received no due acknowledgment even from writers claiming to be

<sup>1</sup> These figures are estimated down to January 1916, the first eighteen months of the war.

well-informed may be shown by this remarkable passage taken from Lord Esher's *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, "The truth is that Lord K., as he was now called, was faced with a grave dilemma. He was no longer the K. of K. of the Sudan and South Africa, and he only as yet was aware of the tragic fact. . . . The armour of his soul had rusted ; he had noted, if others had not, the corroding traces of the passages of years." Elsewhere Lord Esher tells us that "The military transformation of the old Regular into a new National Army was his (Kitchener's) achievement and his alone, for he neither asked nor took the advice of any other man." To have raised *fifty-four* combatant divisions from the United Kingdom alone within the short space of eighteen months, was surely no small achievement for a man "the armour of whose soul had rusted." It was an achievement which the United States, coming into the war at the "fag-end" so to speak, with all her vast resources in men and material, and able to profit from all the alleged mistakes made by Kitchener, could not equal. It may well be questioned whether under the circumstances Lord Esher's lamentable work would not have been better styled "The Tragedy of Lord Esher"! For it is a work which must for ever deprive its author of any claim to be quoted as a serious military authority.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MUNITIONS SHORTAGE

**W**E have already observed that the process of raising and training the new armies was hampered at every point by the general shortage of arms and equipment. There were no barracks, no rifles, no uniforms, no guns. Even in such a comparatively minor point as the soldiers' boots, there was difficulty in obtaining prompt and suitable supplies. The boots for civilian wear, made in general of light materials, were unsuited to long route marches and arduous trench duties. New plant had to be laid down before manufacturers were able to supply the millions of pairs of strong army boots now suddenly demanded. That the shortage experienced to catastrophal degree by the armies at home should, unfortunately, have been experienced to a lesser degree by the armies in the field, must be attributed to the general lack of foresight displayed by the men responsible for our military preparations before the war. The then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir John French, cannot be exonerated from a large share of this responsibility. Writing subsequently in 1914 he has admitted his own total failure to forecast what "the modern rifle, the machine-gun, motor-traction, the aeroplane and wireless telegraphy, would bring about." Yet it is singular that whilst admitting his

own inability to forecast technical developments, he does not fail to bring charges of the very gravest kind, in connection with the shortage of Munitions, against Lord Kitchener, a man who had not been allowed to have the smallest say in our pre-war measures of preparation, and who assumed responsibility when the world was shaken by the greatest war ever known to mankind, and at a time when it became necessary to raise armies upon a gigantic scale never conceived possible in their wildest phantasies by the intellectual luminaries of our pre-war General Staff. The charges brought forward by Lord French against Lord Kitchener in this connection, would seem to show, even from a *prima facie* point of view, a certain lack of proportion. It is, however, an unfortunate fact that Lord French was successful, during the war when all facts were not accessible, in obtaining a wide amount of publicity for these views. He engineered, in fact, a press campaign which came within an ace of driving Lord Kitchener from the War Office, and which only failed in this, which was unquestionably his intention, owing to the fact that the powerful press syndicate, which had placed itself at his disposal, suddenly found itself confronted by the spontaneous indignation of the country, which, called upon to choose between Sir John French *cum* Lord Northcliffe on the one hand and Lord Kitchener on the other, showed its opinion in quite unmistakable fashion by publicly burning *The Daily Mail* on the Stock Exchange. Mr. Churchill writes :

“Up to Monday night it had been determined that Lord Kitchener should be transferred from the War Office . . . but on Tuesday it was realized that his hold on the confidence of the nation was still too great for any Government to do without him.”

In view of the fact that the press intrigue undertaken by

Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief in the field, and Colonel Repington, the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, between them, so narrowly escaped consequences which would have been calamitous to the British Empire, it may be worth while to go into this question of the munitions shortage more nearly.

On August 1st, 1914, Great Britain possessed the following guns available :—

126	.	.	.	.	.	13 pdr.
624	.	.	.	.	.	18 „
28	.	.	.	.	.	60 „
16	.	.	.	.	.	6 inch.
164	.	.	.	.	.	4'7 „
10	.	.	.	.	.	2'75 „
623	.	.	.	.	.	15 pdr.
85	.	.	.	.	.	15 „, Q.F.

All these were guns, there were besides :—

128	.	.	.	.	.	4'5 inch howitzers.
81	.	.	.	.	.	6 „ „
150	.	.	.	.	.	5 „ „
1	.	.	.	.	.	9'2 „ „

All told there was a grand total of 2036 guns and howitzers of which, however, virtually one-third were obsolescent.

Lord Kitchener, upon becoming Secretary of State, issued orders for :—

3584	.	.	.	.	.	18 pdr. guns.
148	.	.	.	.	.	60 „ „
24	.	.	.	.	.	8 inch „
32	.	.	.	.	.	12 „ „
besides :						
804	.	.	.	.	.	4'5 inch howitzers.
16	.	.	.	.	.	6 „ „
32	.	.	.	.	.	9'2 „ „
8	.	.	.	.	.	2'75 „ „



A grand total of 4648 guns and howitzers. Unfortunately, a gun or howitzer is a very technical instrument which cannot be improvised. Mr. Lloyd George speaking in the House of Commons declared that it required eight to nine months to produce a machine-gun. Even with all the plant available, a big howitzer with its mountings cannot be conjured up at a moment's notice. And an acceleration upon a big scale, of the output heretofore accepted as normal, is dependent, in the first instance, on the laying down of new plant. Even by working overtime, technical processes such as "cooling" and "annealing" cannot be hurried without danger of producing an inferior weapon. The task, therefore, of suddenly multiplying the artillery-equipment of the army presented special difficulties which rendered delay inevitable. It must always be remembered that the "normal" demand of our army in time of peace was pitifully small in comparison with the huge task which awaited it. It is not generally realized that even during the South African War we had been obliged to purchase twelve batteries of quick-firing guns from Germany, our own manufacturers being unable to deliver the goods in time. These were the first quick-firing guns ever introduced into the British Army. The South African War also brings us to another deficiency in our artillery, the shortage of heavy guns. During that struggle nothing had excited greater comment than the manner in which the Boers were successful in using heavy guns, such as 6-inch, almost as field-guns. There had been an answer made to it on our side, by using naval brigades, with 6-inch and 4.7-inch guns mounted on improvised field-mountings. And yet there is no record of Sir John French as Chief of the Imperial General Staff having done anything to encourage the use of heavy guns in the field in our armies. Nor did he take any effective

measures for the supply of high-explosive shell for field-guns. Sir Charles Callwell writes :

“The pre-war C.I.G.S. was in a dominating position amongst the Military Members of the Army Council in virtue of his high rank and distinguished antecedents. He was very much more than a *primus inter pares*. He was a field-marshal while the Master-General of the Ordnance was a colonel with temporary rank of major-general. Surely, if he had pressed this matter before the Army Council, he would have received support? I feel equally sure that, supposing the Army Council had refused to listen to his urgings, he would have received satisfaction on representing the matter to the Committee of Imperial Defence.”

If, as he subsequently asserted, Lord French as C.I.G.S. ever urged the provision of H.-E. shell for field-guns, he must obviously have done so in a very faint-hearted manner. And his assertion becomes the more extraordinary in that it was only after very strong representations had been made to him by General von Donop that he agreed to take some high-explosive ammunition for his field-guns in France. Once used it proved its value, and G.H.Q. put forward increasing demands for shell of this type. But here again, as with guns and howitzers, the output of an article which involves a highly technical process of manufacture and a high standard of training and skill in workmanship, cannot be multiplied a hundred fold at a moment's notice. How dangerous an attempt to “rush” matters in connection with such complicated things filled with high-explosives may be, can be shown by the fact that between August and October 1915, no less than sixty-four of our 18-pounders were rendered unserviceable owing to shell bursting in the bore. “Accidents of this character,” writes Sir Charles Callwell, significantly, “have a bad effect upon the *personnel* of

batteries, for the soldier does not like his weapon to play tricks on him." In the French Army similar accidents happening at about the same time caused great loss of life.

The fundamental causes of the munitions shortage were the same as which caused general shortage throughout our armies ; lack of foresight in time of peace. It was a shortage, however, of particularly tragic nature, as it was felt by troops actually in face of the enemy, and in respect to the most vital necessities of warfare. But to assert, as does Colonel Repington, that "Lord K. did not comprehend the importance of artillery in the war, took no effective measures to increase our supplies of it, and concealed the truth of the situation from his colleagues in the Cabinet," is to put forward statements which would not be worthy of criticism but for the fact that the campaign of reckless misstatement and veiled innuendo conducted for so long by an important section of the press, has had the effect of creating a sort of "legend" upon the subject which a study of the work actually achieved by Lord Kitchener at the War Office can hardly pass over without remark. It may be of interest, therefore, to quote from a letter written by Mr. Winston Churchill, who was certainly one of Lord Kitchener's colleagues, and a very influential member of the Cabinet, to Sir John French, as Commander-in-Chief in France. The letter is dated January 8th, 1915, i.e., before Sir John French had launched his journalistic bombshell.

"Your memorandum was circulated to the Cabinet and the War Council. Kitchener also read to the War Council this morning the correspondence you have just sent me. *No one could say he did not place us fairly in possession of your views* <sup>1</sup> . . . he demurred very strongly to sending the

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

fifty-two Territorial battalions, saying that their despatch now would dislocate all his arrangements for the future. . . . He also read a letter from you written a few days before your memorandum about artillery ammunition, and proved, I thought successfully, that it was physically impossible to satisfy these requirements. . . . *I am bound to say that I do not think anyone could complain of the way in which Kitchener stated your position, though the differences of view were apparent.*"

The differences of view here mentioned referred to a proposal by French for offensive operations, which Kitchener, upon grounds approved by the Cabinet, negated. The legend that Kitchener at any time concealed the truth of the situation from his colleagues cannot stand in face of a letter such as this written whilst the whole incident was fresh in mind. Kitchener convinced his colleagues that it was a physical impossibility, at the moment, to satisfy French's demands. Not even the greatest of War Ministers could conjure up munitions by waving a magician's wand. The statement that Kitchener did not comprehend the importance of artillery is remarkable in view of the fact that he had issued orders for over four thousand guns. Mr. Churchill at all events did not find him difficult to convince on the point. He relates how he suggested to Lord Kitchener the construction of some 15-inch howitzers. . . . "Lord Kitchener was much attracted by the idea and the order went forward forthwith." Mr. Churchill relates further on how when the first "tank" idea was broached, "Lord Kitchener . . . was entirely favourable. . . . No demand for such weapons had come, or for many months came, from the military authorities in France."

The theory of G.H.Q. in France, in touch with the realities of war, full of inventive thought, eagerly urging all

kinds of novelties of war upon the authorities at home, but always checkmated by Lord Kitchener's failure to appreciate the technical developments of the war, is not one that will bear examination. The giant howitzers mentioned above were ordered at the end of August long before G.H.Q. in France had shown any inkling of the rôle which the heavy gun was to play in the war. One of them was finished in time for the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. A Committee set up in the War Office recommended the construction of a very large number of 8-inch, 9·2-inch, and 12-inch howitzers. Lord Kitchener approved its recommendations on the spot. This was long before any request for heavy guns or H.-E. shell had been received from G.H.Q. A good deal of the delay in supplying H. - E. shell for field - guns was certainly due to the fact that G.H.Q. were quite a long time in making up their minds as to what they really wanted. On November 6th, 1915, G.H.Q. wired asking for 50 per cent. of 18-pdr. shell to be H.-E. and 50 per cent. shrapnel. One week later another telegram altered the proportion to 25 per cent. H.-E. and 75 per cent. shrapnel.

Something must be said here as to the failure of the private contractors to deliver their goods to time. Thus, on July 1st, 1915, the manufacturers had hoped to deliver 2148 18-pdr. guns, 530 4·5-inch howitzers, and 96 60-pdr. guns, but had actually delivered 803 18-pdr., 165 4·5-inch howitzers, and 37 60-pdr. By the 15th of May 1915 there should have been received 481,500 18-pdr. H.-E. shell, instead of which only 52,400 had been delivered. These delays were due to the difficulty of expanding a highly specialized industry in the midst of the general economic disorganization caused by a titanic war. It must be remembered that it was not only a case of expanding the Munitions

industry, other industries were also being expanded. The Navy had under construction :

Battleships and Battle-Cruisers . . . . .	7
Light Cruisers . . . . .	12
Destroyers of the largest class . . . . .	65
Oversea Submarines . . . . .	40
Coastal Submarines . . . . .	22
Monitors—	
Heavy . . . . .	18
Medium . . . . .	14
Light . . . . .	5
Sloops . . . . .	107
Motor Launches . . . . .	60
Ex-lighters with internal combustion engines	240

All these, which exclude the “light” battle-cruisers, *Courageous*, *Furious* and *Glorious*, were due to be complete by the end of 1915. There was in process the arming of merchant ships, the building of huts for a million men, which meant demands for sanitation, electric lighting, telephones, etc. The army wanted millions of uniforms, a swarm of aircraft were under construction. Factories were working night and day and still lagged behind with deliveries. The first shock of the war led to a certain confusion in the markets abroad, giving rise to delays with vital raw materials. There were labour troubles. Thousands of highly-skilled men had flocked to the colours and the trades unions raised difficulties about allowing unskilled men to be engaged to replace them or to supplement skilled labour. The high wages paid also led to some unedifying instances of wide-spread drunkenness and “slacking.” Not even the Ministry of Munitions with all its vast powers could wholly cope with evils due very largely to the general disorganization arising from the War. Colonel Repington writes that “all deliveries

promised in France were late. . . . I believe that the War Office had given our contracts to men of straw who were unable to produce the goods." Colonel Repington is apparently ignorant that the "men of straw" happened to be great armaments firms of world-wide renown, such as Vickers, Maxim, Hotchkiss, etc., and he would appear to be equally ignorant that the Munitions Ministry, possessed of powers and resources such as heretofore no department of state had ever had placed in its hands, was almost equally behind-hand with its deliveries. It may in fact be said that in time of a great war in which there is an all-pervading shortage of material and a perpetual lack of political and economic stability, there is no department of state capable of working to time and schedule like well-oiled machinery. The sinking of a few cargoes of nitrate coming from Norway or elsewhere would be capable, under certain circumstances, of materially delaying the production of H.-E. shell. The rate of production must in the last resource be controlled by the flow of raw materials and the plant and skilled labour available. No amount of banging on the journalistic drum is going to make one man capable of doing the work of two, or plant meant within a given time to be equal to producing 1000 H.-E. shell to be suddenly capable of producing ten times that number. That is the A B C of the problem.

Even military states such as France and Germany which had maintained Munitions factories upon a very much greater scale than Great Britain,—the "normal" demand of the German army alone was very many times that of this country,—found difficulty in supplying the enormous demands for munitions of all kinds arising from modern warfare. During the 33 months of the South African War, 273,000 rounds of gun-ammunition of all kinds were fired by the British artillery. The average weekly expenditure in

gun-ammunition for the B.E.F. in France for the four weeks ending 5th November approximated to 1,120,000 *a week*. Machinery calculated to produce 273,000 rounds in approximately three years could not be developed to produce 1,120,000 rounds *a week* by a simple stroke of the pen. Even Germany, with all her great military organization and highly-developed munitions industry, found herself running desperately short early in 1915, and again, during the Battles of the Somme, General Sixt von Arnim's reports to Prince Rupert of Bavaria during this tremendous and bloody conflict, which represented, it must be remembered, a life and death struggle to the German Empire, make repeated mention of the "overwhelming British artillery," the shortage of shell, and the paucity of ammunition reserves. Not even Sir John French has ever used language more despairing in contrasting the seemingly lavish supplies of the enemy in guns and ammunition and equipment of all kinds, with the shortage prevailing in his own army. Yet Sixt von Arnim clung to his lines with dogged tenacity, and although these bent here and there, it nowhere came to a break-through. This is a subject to which we shall return.

If the German War Office, after nearly two years of war, with all the advantages of a highly organized munitions-industry, calculated in time of peace to supply the wants of an army *nearly twenty times* as numerous as that of Great Britain, found itself so far in arrears with the supply of ammunition that the German armies locked in a gigantic struggle on the Somme, a struggle which spelt life and death to the German Empire, were sending agonized entreaties for munitions, *munitions*, MUNITIONS, surely it seems unfair and exaggerated to make it a measure of reproach against Lord Kitchener, that, more than a year earlier, in the most difficult and most arduous period of the war, at a



time when everything had to be improvised and all the machinery for raising and equipping armies was in process of being brought into being; there should have ensued inevitable delays in supplying the troops in the field with the altogether unforeseen quantities of ammunition required in modern warfare?

As far back as 1898, a Russian writer, M. Jean Bloch, in a work upon *The Future of War* had drawn attention to the immense consumption of ammunition of all kinds likely to occur in a great European war, and had deduced therefrom, that the sheer cost of supplying armies upon such a gigantic scale would render wars impossible. This economic argument was unfortunate as it served to distract attention from other parts of the book which were of value and which in many respects, predicted the conditions of trench-warfare with surprising accuracy, thus, "instead of war fought out . . . in a series of decisive battles, we shall have to substitute a long period of continually increasing strain upon the resources of the combatants," and ". . . everybody will be entrenched in the next great war. It will be a great war of entrenchments. The spade will be as indispensable to a soldier as his rifle." It is perhaps worthy of comment as illustrating pre-war views in leading British military *coteries* that a writer in Lord Roberts' *Fallacies and Facts* sums all this up as "Bloch's trash." At any rate, nothing written by any leading soldier would indicate any attempt to think out the technical problems involved in a state of "stalemate," with armies locked in Trench warfare. Kitchener himself with his theory of a long war which would be decided by the "last million," would seem to have either partially accepted Bloch's conclusions, or, which is most likely, to have arrived at analogous conclusions independently. In any case, a study of the orders issued by him for ammunition

indicates a very full appreciation of the importance of a prompt and gigantic increase upon the pre-war scale of deliveries. The B.E.F. in France started with 696,000 rounds of ammunition for guns of all calibres ; at the end of 6 months 1,500,000 rounds had been sent out additional, at the end of 12 months 4,259,000, and at the end of 16 months 8,000,000. The amounts *ordered*, however, were far in excess of the actual deliveries, thus, by the end of May 1915, 30,000,000 rounds of 18-pdr. ammunition had been placed on order, with other calibres in proportion.

The manufacture of ammunition was at the following rates :—

1914	
June and July (monthly average)	3,000
August . . . . .	10,000
September . . . . .	10,000
October . . . . .	45,000
November . . . . .	45,000
December . . . . .	78,000

1915	
January . . . . .	93,000
February . . . . .	128,000
March . . . . .	194,000
April . . . . .	225,000
May . . . . .	400,000

In May there were produced in three days the amount of ammunition usually produced in a year in time of peace, and by October 1915, the amount produced was 1,014,812,—this does not include any deliveries from the Ministry of Munitions.

An expansion from a monthly production of 3000 to a

monthly production of 1,014,812 within *fourteen months*, would not appear to justify any complaint that Kitchener failed to appreciate the importance of the munitions question. It was a rate of expansion which the Ministry of Munitions formed subsequently, never came anywhere near to equalling. It should never be forgotten that upon Lord Kitchener fell the whole of the *spade-work* of organizing the munitions supply. Mr. Lloyd George subsequently as Minister for Munitions inherited, so to speak, the whole of the work of his predecessor. The private contracts which had been in arrears began to flow in almost at the very time that Mr. Lloyd George entered upon his new office. The orders given by Lord Kitchener to *close upon* 3000 private firms had just begun to bear fruit, as the new plant laid down by these firms and the new labour installed had got into working-order. If the rate of expansion achieved for the supply of ammunition under Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War be compared with that achieved by Mr. Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions, it will be seen that the *ratio of expansion* was actually very much greater under Lord Kitchener than under Mr. Lloyd George. Thus, for instance, under orders issued by Lord Kitchener, the production of filled and empty shell of all calibres increased from 871,700 in December 1914 to 23,663,186, December 1915, a ratio of increase of roughly *twenty-seven* times as many. The increase from 1915 to 1916 under orders issued by the Ministry of Munitions was from 23,663,186, December 1915, to 128,460,113, December 1916, a ratio of increase of roughly five times as many. The ratio of increase from December 1916 to the end of the war was only from 128,460,113 to 151,947,634, an increase of not quite *one-fifth*. It will be observed that the Ministry of Munitions, whilst it no doubt did useful work, brought about nothing

like the phenomenal increase in production claimed for this body, by some enthusiasts.

The same thing applies not only to shell. In December 1914 we had 12 light trench-mortars, by December 1915, under orders issued by Lord Kitchener these had been increased to 605, i.e., *fifty* times as many. The increase under the Ministry of Munitions was from 605 to 4333 in 1916, a rate of expansion of *seven and a half* times. The increase in hand-grenades was from 2152, December 1914, to 12,202,182 in December 1915, an increase of roughly speaking *six thousand times as many*; under the orders issued by Mr. Lloyd George the increase was only from 12,282,182 to 34,867,966 in 1916, an increase of not quite *three* times as many, and production showed a marked falling off towards the end of the war.

In machine-guns we get the same story. In December 1914, we get a total of 274. By 1915 we see these increased to 6064, a ratio of increase of *twenty-two* times as many. The increase from 1915 to 1916 is from 6064 to 33,200, a ratio of roughly five times.

In small arms ammunition we find the production multiplied *ten*-fold by Kitchener and *two*-fold by his successors.

From this study of results actually achieved it is plain that the back of the Munitions problem had been broken long before Mr. Lloyd George appeared on the scene. The Ministry of Munitions set to work with a great flourish of trumpets and with unlimited spending power, but it may well seem a debatable point as to whether such a body was ever necessary or desirable. The War Office having proved successful, after the inevitable delays due to laying down fresh plant, in multiplying the production of shell *twenty-seven*-fold in the period from 1914 to 1915, we may surmise that it would have been equally capable of making the

further *five*-fold expansion necessary to end the war. The same thing applied to the various classes of guns, trench-mortars, etc.

In view of the facts quoted above, facts unhappily not known to the public in general, it may well be of interest to deal with the origin of the press legend upon this subject, a "press legend" which led to prolonged and bitter attacks upon Lord Kitchener, and which, as we have seen, came within an ace of driving him from the War Office.

Lord French has placed on record *his* version of events in 1914, published, it may be noted, three years after the death of Lord Kitchener, and after three and a half years spent in repose at home had given him the opportunity, we might imagine, of verifying any conclusions formed amidst the haste and nervous tension of a great war. He tells us that after repeated appeals to Lord Kitchener and to public men of all parties had proved unavailing, he decided upon "drastic measures" to destroy "the apathy of a Government which had brought the Empire to the brink of disaster." He was warned that "the politicians would never forgive the action I proposed, and that it meant my certain recall from the command in France." But his decision was already made and he started for his Headquarters, fully determined upon his future course of action. He found waiting for him when he reached there, a telegram from Lord Kitchener "directing that 20 per cent. of our scanty reserve supply of ammunition was to be shipped to the Dardanelles." He then gave instructions "that evidence should be furnished to Colonel Repington, military correspondent of *The Times*, who happened to be then at Headquarters, that the vital need of high-explosive shells had been a fatal bar to our Army success on that day."

May one suggest that this series of artless statements bears very obvious signs of having been written long after the event? At all events they completely disagree with Colonel Repington's own story of the incident. This latter writes on page 36 of his book "I therefore determined to expose the truth to the public, no matter at what cost. I sent off to *The Times* . . . *without consulting anyone*,<sup>1</sup> a telegram which became famous. . . ." That this telegram was inspired by French is unfortunately beyond all doubt, but that at the time, despite all his brave words, he showed no particular desire to avow his authorship of this particular episode may be gleaned from another phrase of Colonel Repington's Diary in which he writes, page 41: "I thought it best in Sir John's interest not to deal much with affairs in France after this episode."

If Lord French, Sir John French as he then was, really thought that it was necessary to take drastic measures to destroy the "apathy of a Government which had brought the Empire to the brink of disaster," it seems surprising that he should never have thought of backing up his requests for munitions by a threat of resignation, should the demands not be acceded to. Such a threat of resignation from the Commander-in-Chief in France could not possibly have been ignored by any Government. And, in the extremely unlikely case of the Government failing to give satisfaction, surely Sir John French could have resigned his command and have made a public statement? If in your patriotic zeal you are going to set all rules and regulations at defiance, why swallow a camel and strain at a gnat? Why engage in an underhand press intrigue instead of adopting the more manly and dignified course? Even had Sir John French's charges been justified up to the hilt, the method he adopted

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

to ventilate his grievances savours too much of a treacherous stab in the back, to be quite commendable.

The impression of a lack of frankness in Sir John French's attitude will be strengthened when we read a letter addressed by him to Mr. Asquith, May 20th, 1915. Although the letter is sufficiently well known I make no apologies for reproducing it here in full. It brings out the curious contradiction between the writer's words and actions, at the time, and his version of them published to the world many years later.

“ HEADQUARTERS,  
“ BRITISH ARMY,  
“ May 20th, 1915.

“ MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

“ FOR two days I have been hesitating to add one iota to the troubles and anxieties which must weigh upon you just now. You have, however, shown me so much true, generous, kindness throughout this trying campaign that I venture at this critical juncture, to convey to you what is in my inmost thoughts. I am sure in the whole history of war no General in the field has ever been helped in a difficult task by the head of his Government as I have been supported by your unfailing sympathy, and encouragement.”

It is worthy of comment that this letter is written to the head of the Government, which, according to the story told by Lord French three years later, “ had brought the Empire to the brink of disaster ” and it bears a date *eight days later* than the telegram sent off by Colonel Repington to *The Times*, a telegram for which Lord French has now avowed responsibility. That Lord French should have made no attempt to back up his demands for munitions, in view of alleged apathy, by a threat of resignation is sufficiently surprising, that he should have preferred to engage in a press-

intrigue instead of choosing the more open and manly course, is more than surprising. But that within eight days of having launched, *secretly*, his journalistic bombshell, we should find him writing to the head of the Government he had set out to destroy, in terms which can only be described as obsequious, is an incident well without parallel in British military history, an incident to parallel which we should have to go back to the days of Godolphin, Harley and St. John.

It is an episode, however, which at least sheds some light upon another point of controversy.

Mr. Asquith in the speech delivered at London June 3rd, 1919, in which he read out the letter quoted above, further read out a letter from Lord Kitchener which runs as follows :

“My Dear Prime Minister—I have had a talk with French. He told me I could let you know that with the present supply of ammunition he will have as much as his troops will be able to use in the next forward movement.”

This letter is dated April 14th, 1915, shortly before Mr. Asquith delivered his celebrated speech in Newcastle. Lord French has denied having ever made any such statement to Lord Kitchener. This denial has been made the basis of a charge made against Lord Kitchener of having given Mr. Asquith false information, thus Colonel Repington in his “Diary” published in 1920, “Mr. Asquith, immediately before, doubtless on the faith of false information supplied to him, had declared in a speech at Newcastle that we had no lack of shells.” And again, “Lord K. when numbers began to fall, concealed the fact from the Government and the public, as he had done in the case of shells.” Lord Esher in his book has also made similar suggestions that Lord Kitchener did not always represent the views trans-



mitted through him fairly. In all this, of course, there is to be traced the influence of Lord French. It is a question, in fact, of the credibility of Lord Kitchener on the one hand as compared with that of Lord French upon the other. It may be as well, therefore, to remember :

(1) All these statements were put forward after Lord Kitchener was dead and unable to answer them.

(2) Lord French's statements concerning the interview with Kitchener preceding the Battle of the Marne have been demonstrated to be quite incredible.

(3) An interview between Kitchener and French referring to munitions did unquestionably take place. We have Mr. Asquith's statement that he instructed Lord Kitchener "to send for Sir John French . . . to interrogate him and get from him a precise report of the then military situation, and to make his report to me before I spoke."

(4) Is it really credible that Lord Kitchener after having summoned Sir John French to London for the special purpose of talking "munitions" with him, should have deliberately set down to write the Prime Minister a false report of what took place at this meeting? Especially in view of Mr. Winston Churchill's evidence referring to another point upon which the Secretary of State for War found himself at variance with the Commander-in-Chief, "*No one could say he did not place us fairly in possession of your views.*"

(5) Is it credible that a Secretary of State for War of Lord Kitchener's calibre, dealing with an interview with the Commander-in-Chief upon our most important battle-front, upon a subject of such vital importance as munitions, and upon which he had been specially

directed to obtain information, should have failed to understand French's views to the extent of totally misquoting him ?

(6) Lord French's memory would seem to be untrustworthy. May we surmise that had Mr. Asquith had no written sheet in the hand written in Lord French's handwriting and addressed from G.H.Q. in France, he would have been equally unable to recollect the obsequious and laudatory phraseology applied by him to the head of the Government which he subsequently proclaimed to have "brought the Empire to the brink of disaster" ?

Looking at the matter in its true perspective, Lord French, writing of these incidents many years after the event, and smarting under a sense of grievance in that he had been relieved of the command in France, would seem to be in a state of considerable confusion as to what actually took place at a time of very general tension and nervous strain. Some clue as to the true motives which led him to launch his ill-advised attack upon the Secretary of State for War may be gleaned from certain references running through 1914 like a crimson thread. For instance :

"It may be remembered that all this time, when the British Forces in France were in absolute jeopardy owing to these deficiencies, trainloads of all kinds of ammunition were passing along our rear *en route* to Marseilles and the Dardanelles."

And again, the statement already quoted, that he found a telegram from Lord Kitchener directing him to send 20 per cent. of his ammunition reserves to the Dardanelles.

Here we have what in Lord French's eyes was the head and fount of Lord Kitchener's offending. There is no

reason to doubt that at the meeting with Lord Kitchener in London in April 1915, French actually used the words attributed to him by Kitchener, but between then and the 12th of May there was an interval of nearly a month, an interval filled with constant worry and anxiety. On the top of this came the order to send 20 per cent. of his reserve-ammunition to the Dardanelles, an order which filled French, full of care for his own army, with fury. French, it must be said, does not tell the story of the 20 per cent. ammunition-reserve to be sent to the Dardanelles with entire fairness. He does not make it clear that this order was meant only to save time. The Dardanelles force was about to launch an offensive and ammunition was a desperate need. A vessel that was loading up from Marseilles would reach the Ægean in time, whereas to pass the consignment through from the United Kingdom would mean missing the ship. G.H.Q. were therefore instructed to forward 20,000 field-gun rounds and 2000 field-howitzer rounds to Marseilles and were assured that these rounds would be immediately sent across the Channel, over and above the normal ammunition-supply. This engagement was actually carried out. The field-gun rounds were replaced within *twenty-four hours* and the others within four days. This was, moreover, the only occasion upon which "trainloads of all kinds of ammunition" were sent along the rear of the Army in France "*en route* to Marseilles and the Dardanelles."

There can be no doubt, however, that it was this order "attaching" 20 per cent. of his ammunition-reserve, which was the spark which finally caused the explosion. It was not merely a question of munitions, it was a question of the general direction of the war. It was an explosion which arose less from "munitions" than from the divergence in outlook with regard to the duration and conduct of the war

between the War Office, under Kitchener, and the G.H.Q. in France, under French. This divergence was complicated by the fact that French affected to look upon Kitchener as a civilian minister. Since the days of Cromwell, the office of Secretary of State for War had never been filled by a soldier, and the civilian politicians who had occupied this appointment had been, in most cases, mere ornamental figure-heads. Even in the cases of men such as Cardwell and Haldane, in which civilian War Ministers had left their mark upon Army Administration, the actual work of preparing plans and the actual practice of Administration, had been the work of their military advisers. But Lord Kitchener was, of course, in quite a different position. The nation had not called him to the War Office with unanimous acclaim, at a time when the British Empire was fighting for its life, for him, the man who was universally regarded as our greatest living soldier, to play the rôle of a Cardwell or of a Haldane. Lord Kitchener, as Secretary of State for War, was much more than a civilian minister, he was the Supreme War Chief so far as Military operations upon land were concerned. It shows a certain lack of perspective upon French's part to have failed to realize the immense difference between Kitchener's position and those of the civilian Secretaries of State. Perhaps it was the secret consciousness that he had played a by no means heroic rôle in the episode between himself and Kitchener preceding the Marne, which led to a sensitiveness against the most just and reasonable exercise of authority by the Secretary of State, which must seem to us to be exaggerated. No doubt, with that capacity for self-delusion which would appear to be one of his most salient characteristics, French had already persuaded himself that Kitchener, upon this memorable occasion, had not led him to do anything he would not have

done of his own accord. But the incident rankled and left an atmosphere of ill-will behind it. He appears to have been haunted by the fear that Kitchener would himself come out to France and assume the supreme command ; so much so that this latter deemed it necessary to send a special messenger over to St. Omer to reassure him. He appears to have read his orders with a wilful desire to find fault and to criticize. Notice has already been made of his loud-voiced complaints that the Secretary of State was keeping back officers and stores vitally needed at the front for the purpose of raising armies which would not be ready till the war was over. Kitchener's refusal to send him fifty-two battalions of Territorials upon grounds that it would dislocate his (Kitchener's) future plans, was interpreted as a wanton and unjustifiable interference with the prerogatives of the Commander-in-Chief in France. In the case of Antwerp, which after all was an operation quite separate and distinct from the operations of the main armies, we get the usual complaint from French that he was not "left to exercise" his "full functions as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in France." Antwerp is not in France. It is in Belgium, and it is hard to see why Lord Kitchener, having arranged with Joffre to employ one or two French Territorial Divisions, should have felt it incumbent upon him to inform Lord French about it. The detachment was not made from the latter's army. Joffre was presumably well able to manage his own business. Lord Kitchener in direct touch with Antwerp by telephone was certainly in a better position to form a judgment upon events happening there than French at Fère en Tardenois in France. The incidents which led to the fall of Antwerp will be discussed more in detail later on, but the episode will serve to illustrate the total lack of proportion in French's

views. Up to the very end, French never seems to have realized that the British Army in France, whilst a very important link, was but a link in a great chain of armies. It was not in reality a case of Kitchener's trespassing upon French's sphere of action so much as of French's trespassing upon Kitchener's. This latter had the responsibility for the conduct of the war all over the British Empire. He had the responsibility of combining the needs and operations not only of the B.E.F. in France, but of forces in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, and the Dardanelles. Yet we find French perpetually bringing forward schemes of operations which would, if accepted, profoundly affect the general scheme of operations, and then, writing in a huff, this is the only phrase which really describes it, that he was not being allowed to exercise his prerogative as Commander-in-Chief in France, when Kitchener negatived them. French's claims, upon analysis, resolve themselves into neither more nor less than a demand to be allowed to control, from the standpoint of the then tiny Expeditionary Force in France, the whole general conduct of the war. This is in no case seen more clearly than in the episode of the Dardanelles. Now, the Dardanelles Expedition may, or may not have been wise. All that will be discussed later. But if there is one thing clear, it is that once the campaign had been started it had to be fought to a finish. In any case the responsibility was not with French but with Kitchener, and it was French's duty to afford his chief whole-hearted support. Yet, as we have seen, what must be regarded under the circumstances as a very natural and justifiable measure of expediency on the part of the Secretary of State for War, sufficed to throw French into a paroxysm of rage in which he did not hesitate to engineer a very gross journalistic attack upon his chief.

We may repeat that it was less the question of munitions in itself than the general atmosphere of friction and ill-will which was responsible for the explosion. French in his heart of hearts must have known that all that was humanly possible was being done to satisfy his needs. But he held views upon the war fundamentally opposed to those of his superior, and he was a man who had stood in uncommonly close relations with the chiefs of the Unionist Party; who had in fact left the War Office under a cloud of vehement political partisanship. Mr. Lloyd George, at the time in the chrysalis stage from which the fervent Apostle of Little England and Peace-at-any-Price, who had escaped the hands of an indignant mob of his fellow-countrymen disguised as a policeman during the Boer War, was to emerge as the Red-Hot Gospeller of War and Imperialism; was already evincing an "intelligent interest" in munitions and other questions calculated to bridge the way to an alliance with his erstwhile political foes; the Unionist chiefs were already showing signs of restlessness at being kept for so long as "outsiders" in the midst of the titanic struggle for world-mastery. The circumstances were apparently favourable enough to bring about a change of Government which would put Sir John French's own political friends in power, and a change of Government would in all probability sweep Kitchener with it. As we now know, the change of Government very nearly *did* sweep Kitchener with it. Unlike French, he was a man who had no political friends. He had never engaged in political intrigue nor had ever cared about wooing popular favour. He had never encouraged journalists or taken them into his confidence. Colonel Repington, who played so prominent a part in French's intrigue, had tried several times to interview Kitchener. The Secretary of State after one interview which seems to have caused him

some unpleasantness, declined to have anything more to do with him. Thus Kitchener, but for the unshakable confidence of the country, would have fared badly as compared with French. And with Kitchener out of the way, Sir John and the school of thought he led at St. Omer, would have become the arbiters of our military policy. We may feel thankful for the outburst of public feeling which saved us from such a consummation.

Finally, in view of the fact that Lord Esher has permitted himself the astonishing statement that Lord Kitchener “. . . failed to convince his colleagues in the Government, that the clamour for shells and munitions was exaggerated,” it may be well to quote the statement of Mr. Churchill, as to what actually took place at a meeting of the Cabinet to which Lord Esher was not invited, about which he appears to have heard only second-hand garbled reports, which he has, moreover, chosen to interpret with a taste for fiction which is, as Mr. Churchill observes, a defect in an historian.

Mr. Churchill writes :

“ Lord Kitchener’s review of the work done by the War Office under his direction, of the progress made in the vast organization of the new armies, the orders issued and the measures taken for their equipment and the supply of munitions, constituted an impressive recital. The effect produced upon the Unionist Ministry was similar to that which is often produced upon the House of Commons when a Government, having long been raved at in the Press, and on the platform, is at last in a fully-ranged debate permitted to expose its own case.”

Kitchener amid all the vile attacks made against him, showed true greatness of soul. He sent a message to French that he had been told of the newspaper attacks upon him



which he had not read but which he was assured had been instigated by G.H.Q., but he did not desire to visit upon the Commander-in-Chief the imprudence of his friends. "I am out," he said, "to fight the Germans not to fight Sir John French." No doubt, had Kitchener known that French so far from suffering from the "imprudence of his friends" was *himself* the instigator of these attacks, he would have taken a different line. There can be little question but that had he challenged the Government upon the issue of *his* resignation or French's dismissal, French would have been cast overboard. Nor was Kitchener the man to shirk such an issue. Himself an honourable soldier, he was slow to suspect baseness in others. He contented himself with an order that Colonel Repington, to whom he attributed the chief blame in the matter, should not be allowed to visit G.H.Q. any more.<sup>1</sup>

How French appreciated the magnanimity thus shown will appear when we remember that three years after Lord Kitchener's death, three and a half years after the events described had happened, in writing *1914* he produced a work remarkable no less for its general muddle-headedness than for its cold-blooded malignity. Much may be forgiven to a man writing or acting on the spur of the moment and under circumstances of profound mental strain, but the man who nurses his venom for three long years, to discharge it against the memory of a dead man, calls for a harder judgment. As hard a judgment as the man who in the midst of the greatest war known to mankind, at a time when the British Empire was fighting for its life and Kitchener had proclaimed that the war would be decided only by the

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Repington gives his usual garbled version of this: "Lord K. was so furious with me about it that he ordered Sir John, in a private letter which the F.-M. showed me, not to allow me to visit his Headquarters any more."

“last million,” was capable of issuing the following posterous “orders” to his troops :

“ *April 14th, 1915.*

“It is observed that of late the provisions of King’s Regulations regarding the shaving of the upper lip have been disregarded . . . Any breach of these regulations will be severely punished in future.”

“Slang” words such as “dug-out” and “bomb” were forbidden. Instead, the words “splinter-proof” and “grenade” were to be used.

The mere fact that G.H.Q. at St. Omer was capable of issuing such orders will do more than many volumes to explain the impossibility of cordial and whole-hearted co-operation between Lord French and Lord Kitchener.

*Note I to Chapter IV*

The part played by Lord Kitchener in the development of the Air Force has been very generally overlooked. It may, however, be usefully considered in view of statements which have obtained publicity as to “the armour of his soul having rusted” and as to his alleged ignorance as to modern military organization. We may quote from *The War in the Air*, a work issued under the authority of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence :

“Lord Kitchener has many titles to the gratitude of his country. . . . The day after the four squadrons took their departure for France he sent for Lieutenant-Colonel Brancker in the War Office, explained to him his policy for the creation of the New Army, and told him that a large number of new squadrons would be required to equip that army. . . .

“In all these arrangements Lord Kitchener took a keen and detailed interest. He saw Colonel Brancker almost every day. He insisted on the creation of new units as a matter of the first importance. He investigated the possibilities of long-range bombing offensives against Germany, and continually urged the development of aircraft with a fuel-endurance and a carrying capacity sufficient for a raid on Essen. For this purpose he knew that trained and disciplined flights would be required, and he gave orders that formation flying was to be taught and practised at once. . . .

“The value of Lord Kitchener’s support was immense. In the early months of 1915 an order of battle for the New Army was produced, showing its organization in corps and divisions. Colonel Brancker when he saw this order reckoned that . . . at least fifty service squadrons would be required. This, while the system of training was not yet in full working order, and while the output of engines and aeroplanes was still so small seemed a very ambitious programme. But the squadrons were needed, so a minute to that effect was circulated among the departments concerned, who promptly added to it their remarks and comments, all critical and sceptical. At last the paper reached the Secretary of State for War, who, without an hour’s delay, sent it straight back by hand to the Deputy Director of Military Aeronautics, bearing an inscription scribbled at the foot, ‘Double this. K.’”

*Note II to Chapter IV*

VON STEIN ON MUNITIONS SHORTAGE IN THE  
GERMAN ARMY

“It has been stated . . . that soon after the outbreak of the war a shortage of ammunition made itself felt, and that,

in spite of this, the Ministry for War was issuing statements that we had enough for every possible contingency. . . . No one had foreseen that during the war the consumption of artillery ammunition would or, indeed, could, be increased to a degree that exceeded what the endurance of the guns was considered to warrant. As it turned out we were, in fact, faced with a shortage of ammunition.

“In 1914 . . . I watched with considerable anxiety the rapid dwindling of our ammunition supply. . . . What would have been the effect upon the public morale if we had declared at that time that we had no more ammunition and what use would the enemy have made of such a confession? . . . It must be remembered that all estimates based on the experience of former wars went by the board. Where once battles lasted a day or several days, they now went on for weeks and months, and in many places were continuous. . . . The fact is often overlooked that even in the most perfectly organized works any innovation involves loss of time. The only way in which this difficulty can be overcome is by equipping all available works in time of peace with machinery that can be immediately adapted to the requirements of war; that, however, means burying capital which must be guaranteed. . . .”

These statements by a very able and experienced German Minister of War may serve to reduce the legend that Lord Kitchener displayed any lack of foresight or zeal in the provision of munitions, to its true perspective. It is worthy of comment, moreover, in view of statements as to the evil effects caused by Lord Kitchener's lack of familiarity with War Office routine and his “disorganizing methods,” that Von Stein had also “never done any previous work at the Ministry of War,” and was “only slightly acquainted with the organization, the routine and the personnel.” He

considers that, "as a newcomer I had the advantage of being able to approach the work independently and unhampered by precedent." Speaking of the Prussian Ministry of War as he found it, he makes the illuminating comment: "It is a point worth consideration whether the co-operation of a few first class business men would not be effective in getting the best possible value for the millions of money that are controlled at this office." Yet the Prussian Ministry for War was unquestionably very much superior, from the standpoint of efficiency, to the British War Office as taken over by Lord Kitchener.

The quotations given are from Von Stein's *A War Minister and his Work*, pp. 114 *et seq.*

## CHAPTER V

1914 - 1915

**I**N the discussion of the work of expansion and of replacement going on at home, and of the Munitions shortage, which has given rise to so much and to such unfounded criticism of Lord Kitchener, we have dealt hitherto but in fleeting glances at the more purely military events of the war. We have seen the German armies sweeping forward almost to the very gates of Paris, to recoil, thanks in no small degree to Lord Kitchener's personal intervention, from the Battle of the Marne. There followed the German rally on the Aisne and the race for the sea in which the contending armies each endeavouring to outreach the other, finally rested their flanks upon the coast. In the midst of this there came the tragic episode of Antwerp. On the 20th of August the Belgian army had retired into this great sea-fortress practically intact. After a vigorous sortie by the Belgians, two German Corps, made up of reserve-troops, carried out a leisurely pursuit and remained in "observation," supported by a third corps, also reserve-troops, at Brussels. For nearly three weeks no further movements were made by the Germans, and during this time their troops in Belgium totalled six divisions, as against six divisions of Belgians. Nor was the investment actually opened until September 28th, close upon six weeks, after the Belgian army had taken refuge within the encircling forts.

It must always be regarded as an initial fundamental fault that the British Expeditionary Force, instead of being dribbled into action piecemeal in France, was not landed with concentrated, decisive effect, at Antwerp. As Mr. Churchill very justly remarks, Antwerp was the true left flank of the Allied Armies. "It guarded the whole line of the Channel Ports. It threatened the flanks and rear of the German armies in France. . . . No German advance to the sea-coast, upon Ostende, upon Dunkirk, upon Calais and Boulogne, seemed possible while Antwerp was unconquered."

It is unfortunate that Mr. Churchill, who here puts forward views the justice of which is beyond all dispute, should not in time of peace, as First Lord of the Admiralty, have formulated plans for a naval action to defend this great seaport, the importance of which to the British Empire had long been accepted as a tradition in British policy; and that he should not have invited the War Office to formulate plans to co-operate with the Navy in such an enterprise. The arguments which Mr. Churchill puts forward become doubly amazing in view of his statement, already quoted, that when Lord Roberts had suggested that a British Army should be landed in Antwerp, the Admiralty had professed itself unable to guarantee the safe transport of such a force, a statement preposterous in itself and presumably only brought forward as a last moment excuse for lack of foresight and general slovenliness of preparation.

In any case, however, the Belgian army available for the defence of the fortress totalled no less than 150,000 men, 70,000 being fortress-troops and the remainder field troops, whereas the German attacking forces were estimated at five divisions, mainly reserve and second-line formations. It would hardly seem, therefore, that all possible had been done by the Belgian government towards utilizing the

interval between their occupation of the city and the German attack, in putting this in a state of defence. On the 28th of August, siege-operations were opened by the Germans, not as is incorrectly stated by Mr. Churchill, "with 17-inch howitzers hurling projectiles of over a ton,"<sup>1</sup> but with Austrian motor-batteries armed with 12-inch howitzers firing a projectile of about 1000 lbs. These, however, were very effective, and the immense shells, far larger than any heretofore experienced in war upon land, even if not quite the monsters of Mr. Churchill's imagining, played with disastrous effect upon the Belgian fortifications. The fall of Namur, occurring a very short time previously, had unquestionably had a disastrous effect upon the *moral* of the Belgian army. Namur had been held to be a first-class fortress, capable of standing a prolonged siege. Like Liège previously, it had fallen like a house of cards before the German attack. All this gave rise to apprehensions concerning their right on the part of the Belgian higher command, apprehensions which would not seem to have been particularly well-founded. Obsessed by the fall of Namur, they would seem to have had no confidence in their power to beat off attacks on their front, and to have been in anxiety about their communications running through Ghent, Bruges and Ostende. A German movement against these would have had the effect of hemming the Belgian army in between the Dutch frontier and the sea-coast. Admitting the force of all this, it seems questionable whether had the Belgian army been handled with the stern resolve of Osman Pasha at Plevna, or which the same army showed subsequently in the battles on the Yser, the German army would

<sup>1</sup> These giant howitzers proved, as a matter of fact, too unwieldy to be useful. It was the lighter Austrian gun which did the bulk of the work.



have found such a movement possible. Whilst the Germans unquestionably possessed a powerful and well-served artillery, it should not be forgotten that they were, at most, barely equal to the Belgians in numbers, and were by no means first-class troops. Whilst the heavy howitzers were of value for the attack of permanent fortifications of the old type, deeply-dug field-entrenchments would have offered a more formidable obstacle. The fall of Namur, as of Liége, had given lessons by which the Belgian General Staff might well have taken warning. At any rate, it hardly seems fair to make it a reproach against responsible military authorities in London and Paris that they should not have foreseen that a large Belgian army occupying a very strong fortress would not be able to maintain itself against the attack of an inferior German force. In writing thus it is not meant to make invidious criticisms against the Belgian troops. Such of these as came into action fought with a heroism to which the Germans themselves have borne witness, thus: "The Belgians of Forts Wavre-St. Catherine behaved like heroes. . . . The Belgians shot well." <sup>1</sup> Yet whilst we may bear willing tribute to the heroism of the Belgian troops, the Belgian Higher Command unquestionably showed itself slow to profit by the lessons already taught by Liége and Namur, and displayed a good deal of feebleness and irresolution. The counter-attacks made were delivered in a fragmentary manner, and no attempt was made to threaten the enemy's left, an operation which would have given the Belgian field troops a chance to engage the enemy upon more even terms; which would certainly have drawn off much of the vigour of the attack of the Germans against the fortress; and which would, above all things, have secured the Belgian army against the feared envelopment.

<sup>1</sup> Fendrick, *Gegen Frankreich und Albion*.

On September 29th, the day after the bombardment opened, Lord Kitchener sent a Staff Officer, Colonel Dallas, to report on the situation. On October 1st, this officer reported that the Belgian War Minister considered the situation very grave, and suggested as the only means to save the town "a diversion from outside on the German left flank." The Minister offered a cavalry division and "possibly" two infantry divisions for this purpose: the French had offered one division and the Belgians "looked forward to co-operation by an English force if that could be arranged."

We may feel disposed to wonder what would have been the effect upon Von Beseler had the Belgian cavalry division and the two infantry divisions mentioned been hurled boldly against the German left during those critical days. But in any case Lord Kitchener willingly undertook to do what he could. The situation was complicated, however, by the fact that neither England nor France had troops to spare. Moreover, up to the very moment of the German attack no request for troops had been made by the Belgian government, thus the staff-work involved in collecting and transporting large bodies of troops had all to be done at the very last moment. Pending the exchange of telegrams with the French Government, orders were given for the despatch of some heavy guns with personnel to the besieged city, this being the arm in which the Belgians were most deficient.

On October 2nd, however, twenty-four hours after the Belgian War Minister's by no means discouraging words to Colonel Dallas, the Belgian Higher Command had changed its mind, and a telegram was received in London informing the British Government that Antwerp was to be evacuated. It seems to have been this telegram which was the cause of

Mr. Churchill's having been sent to Antwerp to report upon the situation. Lord Esher tells an utterly ridiculous story to the effect that Lord Kitchener was in bed and that Mr. Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, burst into the room and "pleaded for the War Minister's permission to leave for Antwerp. In spite of the late hour, Sir Edward Grey arrived in the middle of the discussion, and while he was engaging Lord Kitchener's attention, Mr. Churchill slipped away. He was next heard of when a telegram from Antwerp was put in Lord K.'s hand." We have here a specimen of the spiteful gossip which Lord Esher so often serves up to us as serious history. It is clear that Mr. Churchill went to Antwerp with the full knowledge and consent of his colleagues.

Reports which had reached the British and French Governments were held by no means to justify the Belgian Higher Command in its decision to hastily evacuate a fortress of such unquestionable importance to the entire allied cause. The French military attaché at Antwerp reported that the Germans were not in great force, and had only a limited siege-train, a report we now know to have been accurate.

Lord Kitchener threw himself into the task of organizing a relieving army. The French announced their willingness to provide two Territorial Divisions with artillery and auxiliaries. This they subsequently altered to one Territorial Division, and one brigade of *Fusiliers Marins*. The total contingent was 23,000 men, with 6 field batteries and 86 mitrailleuses. All these were to be landed at Dunkirk October 7th. On the British side there were to be provided: the Seventh Division under General Capper, 18,000 men with 63 guns and a cavalry division under General Byng—4000 men with 12 guns. These were to be landed at Zeebrugge on the 7th. These arrangements were

completed by October 4th, and provided within three days for the concentration of allied forces totalling 45,000 men in a position to cover the Belgian right. To this must be added naval brigades sent direct to Antwerp, bringing the grand total up to 53,000. Unhappily the Belgian troops, weary and disheartened, cowed by the terrific German artillery-bombardment, shattered by counter-attacks which would seem to have been made in a fragmentary fashion which invited disaster, showed a lack of resisting power which led the Belgian Higher Command, always anxious during those critical days, against the danger of envelopment, and suffering from the disastrous moral effect of the fall of Namur, to decide to evacuate the city on October 6th, one day before the troops destined for their support were to have landed.

The failure to relieve Antwerp gave rise to a good deal of acrimonious criticism which would not seem to have been justified. Up to the very day upon which the attack began no urgent appeals had been issued by the Belgian Government either to France or to Great Britain, and there would not seem to have been any reason to believe that the Belgians felt themselves unable to hold the fortress with their own unaided resources.

Once the appeal for help had actually been made, all arrangements for a relieving force were completed between 9.40 A.M. October 3rd and midnight October 4th. And yet it must be remembered that the transport of an army by sea is a most involved and intricate operation which connotes the assemblage of transports, the choice of harbours, the embarkation and disembarkation of troops, the provision of transport for a forward movement, etc., etc. There is here no comparison possible with the movement of an army by railroad.

Lord French indulges in his usual dig at Kitchener with regard to these operations.

“Keenly desirous to influence the course of operations, his telegrams followed one after another, each containing ‘directions’ regarding a local situation of which, in London, he could know very little. . . . I regret that I must record my deliberate opinion that the best which could have been done throughout this critical situation was *not* done, owing entirely to Lord Kitchener’s endeavour to unite in himself the separate and distinct *rôles* of a Cabinet Minister in London and a Commander-in-Chief in France. . . . The calamity at Sedan was due in part to interference from Paris with the Army in the field, and the American Civil War was more than probably prolonged by the repeated interference on the part of the Secretary of State with the Commanders in the field.”

The absurdity of comparing Lord Kitchener, who was an experienced soldier and Supreme War Chief of the British Armies, with the American Secretaries of State, who were civilians ignorant of the very A B C of the Art of War, will serve to take much of the sting from this criticism. At the risk of repetition it may be pointed out once more that the operations to relieve Antwerp were operations distinct from those of the main armies. The true reasons for French’s bitter criticisms become apparent when we read this :

“I was explicitly told by the Secretary of State that the British troops operating there were not under my command.” French objected to Rawlinson having been given an independent command. Yet the smallest consideration must make it clear that Rawlinson, commanding a detached force operating by sea, could not have been made subject to French’s orders. With regard to the “best” not having

been done, is it not apparent that the only means of saving Antwerp would have been for the relief force to have reached Ostende and Bruges *three days earlier*? How could French have brought this about, save by packing his troops upon aeroplanes and flying them across country? And even then these troops must have been completely lacking in artillery!

French tells us: "Personally I had no reason to think that Antwerp was in any immediate danger." It was not until 3 A.M. of the 3rd October that he realized<sup>1</sup> that the city was in danger of being taken, i.e. he was just as much surprised as everybody else. How then could he have relieved Antwerp if everything had been left in *his* hands? The French refused point-blank to give any regular troops. Only after considerable pressing from *Kitchener* would they consent to despatch Territorials and Marines, *second-line troops* short of artillery.<sup>2</sup> French himself had no troops to spare. The Seventh Division was sent out from England, as was Byng's Cavalry Division. It may be repeated: How could French between *October 3rd* and *October 5th* have placed in line at Bruges (*and this alone would have saved Antwerp*) a powerful Expeditionary Force? Would he have conjured up troops and guns from the sandy wastes of the Dunes? Would he have given his own troops wings to fly over to the beleaguered fortress—passing over the fact that he would have left an awkward gap in the French line if he had done so, and that Joffre would probably have objected! It may be repeated: How would French have relieved Antwerp? How *could* he have done so? Is it not apparent that French, in making these serious criticisms against his dead chief, has not taken the smallest trouble to

<sup>1</sup> From a report received from *Lord Kitchener*.

<sup>2</sup> And what artillery they had was armed with old guns.

pause and reflect upon the sequence of events, or the position of his own army in relationship to that of the enemy ?

The true cause of the fall of Antwerp would seem to be simply that the Belgian Higher Command had failed to realize the impotence of old-time fortifications built of steel and concrete to resist modern artillery. The science of defence had failed to keep pace with the science of attack. It was as if a pre-Dreadnought battleship had been pitted against, say, a ship of the *Queen Elizabeth* type. Namur had sounded the warning, but the Belgian Higher Command, stunned and stupefied by the shock, failed to realize in time that the new methods of attack could be met by new methods of defence. The French at Verdun, seventeen months later, beat off an attack infinitely more formidable, yet it will not be asserted that the French were braver troops than the Belgians. The *technique* of defence against the giant howitzers had been developed sufficiently to restore the equilibrium between the attack and defence of fortified places : that is the difference.

Here is a German description of the artillery attack : " Invisibility is to-day the last word of all defence. But, like the shells of fire-spitting, gigantic tortoises, grown from the meadows, lay the forts . . . the guns of their armoured turrets only stretched out their necks threateningly when the cupolas of the turrets rose, and after every shot sank back again." <sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the German gunners had sharply-defined targets, which they were able to batter into ruins at their ease, far beyond reach of any effective reply. The German author describes how the southernmost armoured tower of Fort Wavre which had moved like a gigantic clockwork was,

<sup>1</sup> Anton Fendrick, *Von der Marne Schlacht bis zum Fall Antwerpens*, p. 56.

within a few minutes, reduced to a heap of ruins of steel and concrete. Mr. Churchill writes :

“Antwerp presented the case, till the Great War, unknown, of an attacking force marching methodically without regular siege operations through a permanent fortress line behind advancing curtains of artillery fire.”

The description is a very just one, but it must be remembered that the German howitzers were few in numbers, and that there is no reason to suppose that had the Belgian Higher Command profited by the lessons taught by Namur and Liège, the town could not have been defended, at any rate, long enough for the relieving troops to come into action.

Under the circumstances, however, it is difficult to see what could have been done from London or Paris to stave off the disaster. The German success was due to the surprise use of new tactics : it was a success strictly analogous to the tactical success gained by the use of gas in the Second Battle of Ypres, or to the first British successes by the use of tanks on the Somme. And it bears a family likeness to these successes in that the German Higher Command unquestionably threw away the chance of tactical successes which may well have been decisive of the war, to gain a local advantage. It is pertinent to ask in this connection what would have been the effect had the German Supreme Command, in place of committing themselves to the perilous venture of a flank march through Belgium, concentrated all their effort upon breaking through the chain of great fortresses guarding the eastern frontier of France ? With the object lessons of Liège, Namur and Antwerp before us we can hardly doubt but that such an effort would have been successful. A battle of Verdun fought in August 1914 might well have brought decisive victory to the German



arms. England would have been kept neutral ; the French armies would have been driven back in rout and ruin upon Paris. We see again the failure of the military mind, dulled by years of tradition and routine, to correctly appreciate the tactical advantages to be gained by a whole-hearted use of new engines of war. At any rate, the Moltke tradition of envelopment and the lure of Belgium would seem to have had as fatal an attraction for the German leaders as Metz had for *Maréchal* Bazaine.

Much of the ill-natured criticism passed upon the War Office in connection with the failure to relieve Antwerp would seem to be due to the spectacular manner in which Mr. Winston Churchill chose to interpret his instructions to report upon the situation in Antwerp. That the First Lord of the Admiralty, sent to report to his colleagues upon a difficult and trying situation, should so far forget what was due to himself and to his high office as to become so absorbed in what was after all a local issue, if undoubtedly a very important local issue, as to telegraph to the Prime Minister offering to take formal military charge of the British forces in Antwerp and tendering the resignation of his own office as chief of the Admiralty, was an utterly absurd and ridiculous procedure, arguing a lack of dignity and of sense of proportion on the part of this minister.

Mr. Churchill's own military experience was confined to a short period spent as subaltern of a cavalry regiment, during which period, it may be remarked, he had certainly shown no signs of particular military aptitude. He was entirely lacking in the military technical qualifications necessary to command a large body of troops in action. It is not surprising to learn that his offer of service was declined and that Sir Henry Rawlinson, an experienced soldier, was designated for the command. Nevertheless, the story going round

unquestionably gave rise to a good deal of legitimate criticism, and did much to discredit the government.

After the fall of Antwerp there began the great German thrust to the sea, to which the seizure of this fortress had been a necessary preliminary, and which culminated in the Battle of Ypres. The Battle of the Aisne had resulted in a period of virtual stalemate during which each army had endeavoured to outflank the other. In the meantime, however, the Germans, by placing in the field new formations from their numerous reserves, and utilizing troops set free by the fall of Antwerp, opened up a new offensive movement planned to interpose between the Allied left and the sea, and if possible to "roll this up."

The concentration of important Allied forces for the relief of Antwerp, if not successful in saving the town, unquestionably proved of immense value in covering the Allied left against the new German move. Lord Kitchener, Antwerp having fallen, and the reason for constituting an independent force having ceased to exist, showed his appreciation of the new situation by placing Rawlinson under French's orders.

French as usual was slow in appreciating the danger which menaced him. He writes: "I am free to confess that, on October 15th, 1914, the day on which I date the opening of the battle of Ypres, I thought that the danger was past. I believed that the enemy had exhausted his strength on the Marne and to capture Paris. . . . In my inmost heart, I did not expect I should have to fight a great defensive battle."

Thus the dispositions which resulted that by October 15th the Seventh Division was east of Ypres with the Third Cavalry Division well in advance in the direction of Menin and Courtrai, the Belgian Army, north of Ypres, with a French

Territorial Division, actually within the town itself, were dispositions arising from the arrangements made by Lord Kitchener for the relief of Antwerp, arrangements which had the effect of placing a powerful array of troops in the very position from which the enemy's attack could be most effectively parried.

Into the details of the battle which ensued almost "by accident," as the British Commander-in-Chief in the midst of his own planned offensive movements found himself hotly engaged by a superior enemy, it would be foreign to the purpose of a book, dealing with Lord Kitchener's work at the War Office, to go. Suffice it to say the Battle of Ypres would seem like Albuera and Inkerman to have been a soldiers' battle, in which divisions and corps more or less blundered into action, and in which the eventual success of the British Army depended more upon the sheer fighting power displayed by the long-service professional troops who made up the bulk of the battalions, and upon the daring leadership and individual resource shown by the regimental officers, rather than upon any particular genius displayed by the Higher Command. How narrowly the issue weighed in the balance is made clear by French's own words :

"It looked as if the whole of the 1st Corps was about to fall back in confusion on Ypres. Heavy howitzers were moving west at a trot—always a most significant feature of a retreat—and ammunition and other waggons blocked the road, almost as far as the eye could see. . . . To me, indeed, it seemed as though our line at last was broken. If this were the case, the immense numerical superiority of the enemy would render retreat a very difficult operation, particularly in view of the fact that Ypres and the river Yser lay in our immediate rear."<sup>1</sup> From this desperate situation the

<sup>1</sup> 1914, p. 252.

British Army was saved by the courage and initiative of a junior Brigadier, who, organizing a counter-attack upon his own responsibility, announced the recapture of Gheluvelt, the key of the situation, at the very moment when the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army was in the act of ordering a general retreat. So far as Lord Kitchener was concerned with the battle, his timely reinforcement of French with the Seventh Division, the Indian Corps, and Eighth Division, successively, played a very important part in the successful issue of the fight, a part, however, to which, whilst he has brought so many bitter criticisms against the Secretary of State, Lord French has not seen fit to make any allusion. The Indian Corps went into line October 30th, the very day before the crisis of the battle, which found French meditating retreat. Six selected battalions of Territorials were placed under orders to leave for France. The Supreme War-Chief of the British armies, it was Kitchener's function to concentrate the military resources of the Empire as far as possible on the decisive point. Once there, they must be left to the Commander-in-Chief on the spot to dispose of in action. This was a standpoint which Kitchener steadily maintained up to the very day of his death. It was only an altogether unforeseen emergency, such as French's proposal to retreat behind Paris, which led to the Secretary of State for War actually intervening, in person, in the course of a military operation. But the process of stripping India of European troops was by this time completed and in two months two splendid regular divisions besides a large number of Territorial battalions had been sent to strengthen French.

The episode of Antwerp was followed by the ill-fated and much-discussed Dardanelles Expedition. In dealing with the part in this played by Lord Kitchener, attention should

be drawn to the fact that the scheme originated as a purely naval enterprise. The armies on the western front were at a deadlock. Only by throwing into the scale gigantic reinforcements which were not yet ready, could it be seriously hoped to weigh down the balance there. On the Russian front also things, at that time, were more or less at an equipoise. In Asia Minor considerable Russian forces were being engaged by Turkish armies, and were, at the time, hard-pressed; a small British force at the head of the Persian Gulf was conducting successful operations. A Turkish Army was menacing Egypt and the Suez Canal. Under the circumstances there was much to be said for an enterprise which, by threatening the very heart of the Ottoman Empire, would at least have the effect of drawing away troops which were menacing Great Britain and her allies. It is a sound military maxim that the best way to defend is to attack. The Turks, if occupied in the defence of their own capital, must necessarily relinquish the thought of waging offensive warfare against Egypt or the Caucasus. It was wholly a question of the relationship of means to end. And here Mr. Churchill offered a comparatively cheap means to deal a very effective blow. He, as First Lord of the Admiralty, was confident that the Navy, *alone*, could force the Dardanelles. In these views he was supported by no less authorities than Vice-Admiral Carden, the Admiral commanding the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Oliver, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Sir Henry Jackson,<sup>1</sup> and last but not the least, Sir A. K. Wilson, an admiral who deservedly enjoyed to a unique degree the confidence of the entire fleet. The popular idea that the scheme was "rushed"

<sup>1</sup> The latter, however, expressed the view that the attack was not to be recommended without the simultaneous employment of military forces.

without due consideration of the technical gunnery problems involved, would not seem to be justified. Much has been made of Lord Fisher's opposition to the scheme, but this opposition would not appear to have been founded upon anything in the nature of a disagreement with the technical issues involved. The First Sea Lord had his own pet scheme, a plan for landing an army on the North Sea front of Germany, and disagreed with the Dardanelles venture as distracting troops and ships away which he held could be used in a more decisive fashion nearer home.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult, if not impossible, in practice to lay down any hard and fast rule as to what ships can or cannot do against forts. In 1816, Lord Exmouth's squadron successfully bombarded Algiers, during the Crimean War iron-clad floating batteries made havoc of the Russian forts at Kinburn, and in 1881, a British fleet successfully bombarded Alexandria. In general it may certainly be said that a sea-going warship can only engage land-batteries under circumstances of great disadvantage, in that part of her displacement, being devoted to factors such as speed, stores and sea-going qualities, only a fraction of the sum-total is available for offensive and defensive purposes. Moreover, a ship, built to fight at sea against long-range guns of comparatively flat projectory, stands at a disadvantage compared with a fort, particularly if this is sited upon rising ground, in that her weakest point is her deck which can be reached by a plunging fire. All this, however, does not rule out the possibility of the normal balance between ships and forts being upset by new inventions. The iron-clad batteries at Kinburn are a case in point. It has been very generally asserted that Mr. Churchill, impressed by the terrific effect of the German 15-inch howitzers at Antwerp, and ignorant of the technical

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fisher's *Memories*.

differences between land howitzers and naval guns firing from floating platforms, imagined that the guns of the *Queen Elizabeth* could repeat the performance of the German artillery. Mr. Churchill's mistake would seem, in point of fact, to lie in failure to appreciate the difficulties in the way of ranging, "spotting" and controlling the fire of ships against land-batteries. The Germans at Antwerp had the advantage of occupying higher ground upon which they could fix observation posts to observe the fall of shell and to correct mistakes in ranging, and these "observation posts" were, moreover, supported by an array of kite balloons. The Belgian forts formed clearly-defined targets, "giant tortoises grown from the meadows" as the German writer terms them, and they were smashed to pieces within a few minutes after the attacking artillery had opened fire. Ships firing from the water's edge without observation-posts— aeroplanes were at this period quite an ineffective substitute—were at a very considerable disadvantage compared with howitzers attacking on land. To this must be added the very much smaller bursting charges carried by the naval shell. These, in the larger calibres, meant for attacking armour-plate, are made necessarily with thick walls, and carry in consequence less than a third of the bursting-charge used by land-guns of corresponding calibre. When we add to this the fact that no *high-explosive shell* were available, we get qualifying factors to which Mr. Churchill would not appear to have attached the importance they deserve.

Above all things, however, the naval attack upon the Dardanelles differed from the German attack upon Antwerp, in that there was an entire lack of *simultaneous* military support. This is a factor the responsibility for which unquestionably lies with Mr. Churchill.

In his own words : " Antwerp presented the case, till the

Great War, unknown, of an attacking force marching methodically without regular siege operations through a permanent fortress line behind advancing curtains of artillery fire." The "advancing curtains of artillery fire" would not *in themselves* have sufficed to reduce Antwerp. It was the waves of infantry following hard on the curtain of huge shells, which rendered it impossible for the Belgians to restore their shattered lines, and which secured to the Germans new gun positions from which the line of giant howitzers could be brought nearer and nearer. To make the analogy complete, therefore, we must conceive the naval guns of the *Queen Elizabeth*, and other ships, supported by wave upon wave, of advancing infantry. Without this there would be no more chance of a naval bombardment *permanently* reducing the fortifications of the Dardanelles, than of the half-dozen or so big howitzers, *unsupported* sufficing to reduce Antwerp. It is characteristic of the confused standpoint from which Mr. Churchill approached the problem that even when writing his book *The World Crisis* in 1923, eight years after the events described, he shows no glimmering of an appreciation of this. He consistently takes the standpoint that the artillery attack *alone* should have sufficed. He quotes Sir Arthur Wilson's statement to the Dardanelles Commission, upon the artillery aspects of the problem, at length, and hotly assails Admiral de Roebuck's subsequent refusal to carry on the attack without military support. What he is attempting to maintain resolves itself in fact into an assertion that Artillery fire should suffice *in itself* to reduce a fortress, an hypothesis which, in the case where the fortress is stoutly defended, ends in a *reductio ad absurdum*.

In any case, however, the scheme as originated was to be a purely naval operation. Mr. Churchill writes :



“It will be seen that the genesis of this plan and its elaboration were purely naval and professional in their character.”

Lord Kitchener was unquestionably in favour of the scheme as presented to him by Mr. Churchill. It was a scheme which, if successful, offered great advantages. But it was a naval operation to which he was not asked to afford any military support,<sup>1</sup> save indirectly by effecting the seizure of Alexandretta, a project which on grounds of the defence of Egypt, always lay near to his heart. It was for the Admiralty to say what they could or could not do. It must be remembered that although in 1906 the Committee of Imperial Defence had inquired into the question of forcing the Dardanelles and had received a report that was unfavourable; when the project of a naval attack was mooted, no responsible naval authority came forward to assert that such an attack was technically *impossible*. We have heard so much wisdom upon the subject after the event that it is as well to remember that those naval authorities who were not in favour were certainly not avowedly hostile. In any case, in view of criticisms made against Lord Kitchener, it may be as well to repeat that the responsibility in the matter was purely naval. Mr. Churchill writes concerning the subsequent intervention by the War Office after the naval attack had failed:

“I do not believe that anything less . . . reinforced as they were by dire necessity would have enabled Lord Kitchener to wrest an army from France and Flanders. In cold blood, it could never have been done.”

Mr. Churchill is unquestionably right in this. Called upon by the Navy to extricate them from an enterprise

<sup>1</sup> See Admiralty Memorandum quoted by Churchill, *World Crisis*, Vol. II, p. 120.

upon which they should never have embarked, Lord Kitchener was forced to engage in a series of operations which he would never have contemplated in cold blood. . . . As Mr. Churchill states :

“There would have been no Dardanelles with its hopes, its glories, its losses and its ultimate heartbreaking failure.”

By the end of January the situation in the Near East had somewhat eased. The Turkish attack upon the Suez Canal had ended in a fiasco. In the Caucasus their armies had been decisively beaten by the Russians, in Mesopotamia a small British force was marching from victory to victory. A tendency to rate the Turks low became apparent in high British official circles. This did not lack a certain justification. The Turks had made a poor showing in the Balkan War, and all their military operations had up to the present shown no signs of forethought or efficiency or of tenacity whether in attack or in defence.

Preparations for the attack on the Dardanelles continued but Mr. Churchill, whilst still professing confidence in the power of the Navy to effect the bombardment alone, began to press for an army. To a certain extent Kitchener was willing to give co-operation. The lesson of Alexandria, when although the fleet had crushed the forts, no army had been available to occupy the city, was always fresh in his mind. Provided that the fleet could secure the passage of the Straits *unaided*, Kitchener was willing enough to provide a landing-force to secure the results of victory. But he was not prepared to “mount” a military operation upon a large scale on account of the immense transport difficulties involved, the difficulty of *terrain* in the proposed theatre of operations and the demands from other theatres of war. As Mr. Churchill admits, neither Lord Kitchener nor the

War Council would at this time have contemplated the idea of storming the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Mr. Churchill, in his own vindication, has not hesitated to attempt, most unfairly, to throw a good deal of the blame for what happened subsequently upon Lord Kitchener. In fact, a perusal of his *World Crisis* rather inclines us to the opinion that the only person who was *invariably* right, and who *invariably* discerned, with unerring judgment, the correct thing to do, was Mr. Winston Churchill. For instance :

“The workings of Lord Kitchener’s mind constituted at this period a feature almost as puzzling as the great war itself. . . . The problem was not insoluble . . . a well-conceived and elaborated plan and programme could have been devised in January for action in the Near East in March, April, May, or even June, and for a subsequent great concentration and operation on the Western Front in the autumn of 1915. . . .” Well-conceived and elaborated plans in war have an unfortunate knack of being upset by the enemy. The German plan of sweeping through Belgium and of driving the French Armies in one grand sweep against the Swiss frontier was no doubt “well-conceived and elaborated.” It came to a lamentable end at the Battle of the Marne. Mr. Churchill’s assertions examined in the clear cold light of common-sense are as foolish as his assertion made later on that the Germans required *two months*<sup>1</sup> to move troops from the Eastern Front to the Western. Lord Kitchener was rightly opposed to a policy which would have involved locking up the only reserves which, at the time, the British Empire possessed, in an enterprise remote from the main theatre of war. Mr. Churchill draws up a table of ten divisions which he asserts were at the time available for use

<sup>1</sup> They sometimes did this in two *weeks*.

in the Dardanelles Expedition. But of these ten divisions the greater part had not completed training, were ill-equipped, and were certainly not in a condition to undertake offensive operations involving staff-work of the most involved and intricate kind. Certainly, moreover, a great military operation at the Dardanelles was the very last thing which at the time Lord Kitchener desired. The operation had been suggested by Mr. Churchill and authorized by the Cabinet as a purely naval operation. Surely, it displays a curious lack of perspective on the part of Mr. Churchill, after having undertaken to reduce the forts with the Navy alone, to express surprise and sorrow, that his colleagues should have been unwilling to join him in converting the scheme of operations thus sanctioned into a military project of most pretentious and far-reaching description.

On the 16th of February 1915, say the Dardanelles Commissioners: "It had not been definitely decided to use troops upon a large scale, but they were to be massed so as to be in readiness should their assistance be required."

The War Office view was expressed in a telegram sent on February 24th through the Admiralty to Admiral Carden. "The War Office consider the occupation of the Southern end of the peninsula to the line Luandre-Chana-Ovasi as *not an obligatory operation for ensuring success of the first main object.*<sup>1</sup> Though troops should always be held in readiness to *assist in minor operations* . . . our main army can remain in camp at Lemnos till the passage of the Straits is in our hands."

Mr. Churchill writing eight years subsequently exclaims against this as a policy of half measures. Yet the whole enterprise hinged upon his own *definite guarantee* that the Navy could force the Straits unaided and that so far as the

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

army was concerned, only a "clearing up" expedition was proposed, an expedition to consolidate the gains assumed to be made by the Navy. For this purpose, in a telegram sent to General Birdwood, February 26th, Lord Kitchener authorized him to draw upon the Australasian Army Corps "up to the full limit of its strength."

Friction occurred at this time between Mr. Churchill and Lord Kitchener with regard to the Twenty-ninth Division. This splendid division of regular troops formed at the time the *only* reserve of regular troops which the British Empire possessed. Mr. Churchill urged that it should be used for the "following up" Expedition to the Dardanelles. Lord Kitchener, whilst originally favourably inclined, received an urgent request from General Joffre, that this division, the sole reserve at the moment for the B.E.F. in France, should not be sent so far away as to be unavailable in the event of a renewed German offensive. Such a request could not possibly be ignored. The Division was, for the time, retained in England. Mr. Churchill speaks of Lord Kitchener having "changed his mind," and would insinuate irresolution. But he does not mention the urgent request from Joffre which was the true cause for the withholding of the Twenty-ninth Division. Nor, although upon the withdrawal of this division Mr. Churchill went so far as to disclaim responsibility for any military operations that might arise, does he make it clear in his book, how this Division could have affected the *naval attack*. He did not propose the only course which would have been practicable, viz., that the Division should be landed under the guns of the fleet and storm the forts under cover of a methodical curtain of fire. Mr. Churchill's proposals were limited to a "following up" action or an action *after the fleet had failed*, viz., "All these troops (29th Division, etc.), are capable of being concentrated

within striking distance of the Bulair Isthmus by March 21st. If the naval operations have not succeeded by then, *they can be used to attack the Gallipoli Peninsula and make sure that the fleet gets through.*"<sup>1</sup>

This is an illuminating phrase which gives the key to much of the subsequent disaster. Mr. Churchill proposed in fact to conduct an experiment with the fleet. If this experiment failed, in plain English if the fleet got beaten, then the army was to come into action and under the most disastrous conditions possible, in view of the fact that the enemy would have received ample warning and would fight flushed with an initial victory. Is it not plain from this that the whole disastrous enterprise arose from the fact that the First Lord of the Admiralty had completely misread the lesson of Antwerp, that he had no clear idea of the technical issues involved in an action of artillery against forts? How far he had travelled from his original standpoint may be seen by comparing his memorandum to Lord Kitchener of January 20th :

“Until the bombardment of the Dardanelles forts has actually begun, we cannot tell how things will go. We must guard against the appearance of a serious rebuff; and we shall therefore at the outset only use the battleships needed for the initial stage, keeping the rest of the fleet spread between Malta, Alexandria and Alexandretta, whence they can concentrate very quickly. It is also very desirable that the Alexandretta operation should be so timed as to be practically simultaneous with the attack on the Dardanelles, so that if we are checked at the Dardanelles we can represent that operation as a mere demonstration to cover the seizure of Alexandretta.”

Here we have Mr. Churchill presenting a comparatively

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum by Mr. Churchill, February 25th, 1915. My italics.

modest scheme requiring no great military operations. He received his colleagues' assent without difficulty. Not much more than a month later we find this project converted into a grandiose scheme, requiring 115,000 troops, we find the Alexandretta project thrown completely overboard, we find it suggested that "If the naval operations have not succeeded by then, they (the 115,000 troops) can be used to attack the Gallipoli Peninsula and make sure that the fleet gets through." Mr. Churchill's imagination always prone to quick enthusiasms and sensitive to spectacular effect had in the meantime been fired with the vision of a swift and decisive victory, a victory which would cut the Turkish Empire in twain, place the enemy's capital in our hands and eliminate the Ottoman Empire from the war at a stroke. It was a bold vision and worthy of a descendant of Marlborough, but it was a scheme which in reality hinged upon a fundamental misconception of the technical aspects of the case, a misconception of which Marlborough himself, a soldier who used every arm to perfection, would never have been guilty. It is conceivable enough that a swift sudden landing by *troops alone* might have rushed the Dardanelles forts as the Russians in the war of 1877-8 rushed the great Turkish fortress of Kars; it is practically certain that a scientifically co-ordinated, *simultaneous* attack by troops and warships would have achieved success, but it is no less certain that the scheme proposed by Mr. Churchill, the proposal for an attack by troops after the fleet had tried and failed, was a scheme fundamentally vicious, violating every rule of sound strategy, as of common-sense, and which practically invited the disaster which ensued. The Dardanelles Commissioners, who did not hear Lord Kitchener's side of the question, have placed on record, "We think Mr. Churchill was quite justified in attaching the utmost importance to

the delays which occurred in despatching the 29th Division and the Territorial Division from this country," and Mr. Churchill has quoted this passage in his book. It is, however, clear that these two divisions attacking alone after the fleet had sustained a very severe reverse would have had no chance of doing anything useful. The most valuable element appertaining to such an attack, the element of surprise, would have been absent. The Turks we know to have been good troops, well-handled, and even if small reconnaissance-parties landed without great difficulty, a landing in force would have been quite a different proposition. Prompt measures would certainly have been taken upon the Turkish side, and the disaster at sea would conceivably have been followed by a yet greater disaster on land.

On February 19th the Fleet opened the bombardment of the Dardanelles. After five days' interval, this was resumed February 25th and 26th. The attack was successful and the outer forts of the Dardanelles were put out of action. Hope ran high in British official circles. Mr. Churchill relates that he pointedly asked Lord Kitchener if he accepted responsibility for any military operations that might arise in connection with the Dardanelles. Lord Kitchener replied in the affirmative. The question would seem to have been rather uncalled for. The enterprise had already been opened as a *naval* one. No troops were at the time anywhere near the Dardanelles. No action by Lord Kitchener could affect the issue one way or the other. Mr. Churchill states that no staff-work was done by the War Office, and that the troops sent were not embarked in any order or organization to fight on arrival at their destination. The Dardanelles Commission made similar comments. But as Sir Charles Callwell illuminatingly remarks "A . . . 'preliminary scheme' of operations' would have been of little service to



the C. in C. of 'Medforce'—it must have been based on the mistaken assumption (which held good when he started) that the fleet would force the Straits and it would consequently have concerned itself with undertakings totally different from those which, in the event, Sir Ian had to carry out. If the army was to derive any benefit from projects elaborated in the War Office, there must have been a second 'preliminary scheme of operations' based upon the assumption that the fleet was going to fail. What profit is there in a plan of campaign that dictates procedure to be followed after the first great clash of arms? In the case under consideration, the first great clash of arms befell on the 18th of March, five days after Sir Ian left London with his instructions, and it turned the whole business upside down."

Sir Charles Callwell explains earlier in his text that at the time the troops sailed it remained quite an open question as to what exactly their task was to be. "The transports could not have been appropriately packed even after military operations in the Gallipoli Peninsula had been decided upon, without knowing exactly what was Sir Ian's plan."

We are forced continually back to the issue that Mr. Churchill had misled his colleagues and himself into the belief that the Navy alone could force the passage of the Straits and that the function of the army would be to "follow up." Nothing was ever written more illustrative of the text that a little knowledge is dangerous than Mr. Churchill in these months rushing blindly to disaster, and dragging his colleagues and the Empire with him. The danger of a military amateur, installed in a position of weight and authority, in time of war, was never more strikingly exemplified. Far better would it have been for his country had Mr. Churchill been possessed of *no* knowledge

of naval or military affairs than the shallow, superficial reading which with him replaced the deep, technical knowledge requisite for a Nelson, a Lee, or a "Stonewall" Jackson; Jefferson Davis's habit, due to his own education at a military academy, of meddling with military matters which he did not really understand, brought the Southern Confederacy to its ruin. Mr. Churchill's complacent amateurism was destined to cost the British Empire a bitter price in blood and tears and sorrow.

In any case, Lord Kitchener had no authority to veto the First Lord of the Admiralty from experimenting with his ships if his naval advisers allowed him to do so. It was for the responsible chiefs of the Navy to say if the enterprise were technically feasible or not. Of the choice between Fisher's project of a landing in Borkum and Churchill's scheme for the Dardanelles, the latter certainly seemed less hazardous. The War Office came into the scheme only by way of providing a comparatively small force for "following up."

On the 12th March Sir Ian Hamilton was appointed Commander-in-Chief for the proposed operations. His letter of instructions, characterized by Colonel Repington as "infantile," ran as follows :

"(1) *The Fleet have undertaken to force the passage of the Dardanelles.*<sup>1</sup> The employment of military forces on any large scale for land operations at this juncture is only contemplated in the event of the Fleet failing to get through *after every effort has been exhausted.*<sup>1</sup>

"(2) Before any serious undertaking is carried out in the Gallipoli Peninsula, all the British military forces detailed for the expedition should be assembled so that their full weight can be thrown in.

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

“(3) Having entered upon the project of forcing the Straits there can be no idea of abandoning the scheme. It will require time, patience and methodical plans of co-operation between the naval and military commanders. The essential point is to avoid a check which will jeopardise our chances of strategical and political success.

“(4) This does not preclude the probability of minor operations being engaged upon to clear areas occupied by the Turks with guns annoying the Fleet or for demolition of forts already silenced by the Fleet. But such minor operations should be as much as possible restricted to forces necessary to achieve the object in view, and should as far as practicable not entail permanent occupation of positions on the Gallipoli Peninsula.”

It is plain from these instructions that the employment of military force to effect the passage of the Dardanelles was looked upon with greatest reluctance. The principal reliance was upon the fleet. The army was to be used for minor operations. The War Office, whilst prepared in case of extremity to back up the Admiralty, accepted the view officially put forward by the latter, that the fleet alone could force the passage.

The attack made on the 18th of March ended disastrously. Six battleships were either sunk or put out of action, among them the Dreadnought battle-cruiser, *Inflexible*.

On the 21st, Admiral de Roebuck commanding, came to the decision that the attack could not be renewed. The Navy having undertaken the reduction of the forts was unable to achieve its task. Mr. Churchill writes: “Lord Kitchener was always splendid when things went wrong. Confident, commanding, magnanimous, he made no reproaches. In a few brief sentences he assumed the

burden and declared he would carry the operations through by military force."

But the operations, founded upon an estimate of the situation which has shown itself to be fundamentally false, started from the outset under terrible handicaps. The small military force had been planned for "following up" or for minor operations, not for breaking through. Plans and necessary staff-work could not be formed with everything so to speak "in the air." Only after the fleet had failed and the military authorities had been called in to take up the burden, did these find themselves faced with a clear-cut issue. This is a point which Mr. Churchill in his narrative consistently shirks. In his anxiety to explain away the ultimate ill-success of the venture he altogether minimizes the falsity of the position into which he had led the Secretary of State for War.<sup>1</sup>

Into the long story of the Dardanelles Expedition it would be foreign to the purpose of this book to go. Mr. Churchill having undertaken that the fleet would use every effort and having confronted the Secretary of State for War with an assurance of prolonged naval operations *extending over many weeks* found himself in view of the decided stand at last taken by his naval advisers quite unable to fulfil his obligations. Yet the Government and Public Opinion clamorously demanded that Great Britain should not passively accept a disaster in the Near East. Lord Kitchener himself, sensitive to our prestige in Egypt and in India, felt that every possible measure must be taken to retrieve if possible the situation.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Henry Jackson, the chief naval adviser, was quite clear that "The naval bombardment is not recommended as a sound military operation, unless a strong military force is ready to assist in the operation. . . ." The responsibility for overriding the advice of his chief technical expert must rest with Mr. Churchill. See *World Crisis*, Vol. II, p. 179.

Serious delays, however, were inevitable, before the Army, faced by a task totally foreign to the original conception of the scheme, could settle down to its work; delays which afforded the enemy valuable time in which to consolidate his defences. The difficulty of Lord Kitchener's position was complicated by the universal shortage in troops and stores and munitions. As we have seen it was not until May of this year that the full complement of guns for the First New Army became available, and even then the equipment of dial-sights, etc., was still deficient. The Second New Army had no howitzers. The Third and Fourth New Armies were worse off still. The Australian troops and Territorials who were to play so large a part in the expedition were hastily-trained troops, short of equipment; the Twenty-ninth Division, splendid regulars, the backbone of the force, had suffered prolonged delays before they could be embarked owing to lack of equipment. Mr. Churchill with an assurance which the disasters and loss of life into which he led his countrymen do not seem in the least to have abashed, claims that Lord Kitchener should have said to Joffre and Sir John French, "I have not got enough ammunition to sustain a battle on the Western Front. I will not allow the British Army to be launched without it. There is no imperative need for an offensive either by the British or the French Armies. . . . On the other hand, we are about to attempt an attack on the Dardanelles." All this is patently absurd. Ammunition is required not only for attack but for defence, and it is at least doubtful if an army too short of ammunition for an attack can be held to be sufficiently well provided to maintain a defence. At any rate, for the British Army and that of France to have definitely renounced all idea of offensive operations in the west during 1915 could have led but to two things :

(i) The Germans would have resumed the offensive on a large scale and the Second Battle of Ypres, which, owing to the use of gas came as it was within an ace of breaking the British lines, might well have been a decisive German victory.

(ii) The Germans, left unmolested, might have withdrawn half a million men or so for use against the Russians. The break-through at Gorlice, as it was, resulted in a series of sweeping victories. Przemysl and Lemberg were restored to their arms and ultimately Warsaw and Brest-Litovsk passed under German colours. Had Ludendorff and Hindenburg had another half million men or so, the German victories would certainly have been even more decisive, and we should have witnessed a *débâcle* on the Russian front far outweighing any possible results accruing from the seizure of the Dardanelles. Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, and the French Spring offensive, which Mr. Churchill, with his customary hardihood, characterizes as "long and frightful follies," if they did nothing else, pinned down to their trenches half a million German troops, who would otherwise have intervened with disastrous effect upon the Russian front.

On the other hand, Mr. Churchill reproaches Lord Kitchener with not having insisted upon the naval attack being resumed, if the Secretary of State for War were not prepared to renounce all idea of offensive operations on the Western Front coincident with the Dardanelles Expedition. He writes, "The issue would have been grim but again quite simple. I should have said to the War Council, 'If you wish this thing attempted, say so, and I will find a *First Sea Lord and a Commander-in-Chief to execute your will.*'"<sup>1</sup> From all which it is clear that the First Lord of the

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

Admiralty, up to the bitter end, had not learnt his lesson. Having overridden Sir Henry Jackson's opinion that the attack was not feasible without a strong military force, he was quite prepared to repeat his folly and to suffer in all probability a yet greater disaster in doing so.

The task before Lord Kitchener as Supreme War-Chief of the British armies was to maintain, in combination with Joffre, sufficient pressure upon the German armies on the Western Front to ward off a possible German offensive, and at the very least to pin the German troops down to their trenches. This done, he had to squeeze troops and stores and munitions, in the endeavour to convert the initial disaster sustained by Mr. Churchill, into a victory. And all this was to be done in the midst of the gigantic task of raising and training the new armies, providing munitions and stores upon a hitherto unthought of scale, in the midst of an atmosphere of Parliamentary and Press intrigue, and in the teeth of the almost open hostility of the Commander-in-Chief in France. Yet tremendous as was the task, Kitchener came within an ace of achieving it. The Battle of Suvla Bay marked the high-water mark of the Dardanelles Expedition. An army had been concentrated superior to that of the enemy, the latter had been outmanœuvred and outflanked and forced to give battle in a position from which defeat meant irretrievable disaster. But at this critical moment there intervened two factors which could not have been foreseen. The British commander at the decisive point, Sir Frederick Stopford, a commander sent out to Sir Ian Hamilton at the request of the latter in place of Sir Spencer Ewart, whom Lord Kitchener had suggested, displayed inexplicable sloth and incapacity at the critical moment, whilst on the Turkish side there appeared a soldier whose daring genius and unshakable

tenacity were destined to play subsequently a great rôle in the fortunes of his country ; Mustapha Kemal Pasha. The critical hours spent by the British in smoking, cooking, and even in bathing were spent by Turks in rushing every gun and battalion they had, to the decisive point. Under these inauspicious circumstances the battle which had opened under such favourable prospects, ended in a draw which was, for the British, a strategic defeat. The doom of the Dardanelles Expedition was sealed.

Whilst the Dardanelles Expedition was in progress, events in the other theatres of war had marched with gigantic strides. The German break-through at Gorlice had been followed by the series of sweeping victories already alluded to. Russia beaten to her knees called upon her Allies for help, an appeal which the doubtful attitude of Bulgaria rendered doubly forceful. It was urgent to display to this wavering state, the power of the Allied arms. There followed the Battle of Loos, a tragic story of muddle and mismanagement, in which the valour of the British troops engaged was a useless sacrifice to bad leadership and wretched staff-work. Loos was taken by storm, and the lines of entrenchment beyond, but French, slow as usual in grasping the realities of the situation, kept his reserves back, and Haig, left unsupported, lost most of his gains. It was the story of Suvla Bay over again, but how narrowly the Allies came to winning a decisive victory has since been revealed by the Germans themselves.<sup>1</sup> Troops had to be rushed through from the Eastern Front to restore a situation which appeared to the Germans to be desperate.

Unhappily the Battle of Loos did not bring about for the Allies any such successes as could convince Bulgaria of the evil of her ways. On September 19th, six days before the

<sup>1</sup> Ludendorff, *Memories*. Falkenhayn, *G. H. Q. and its Decisions*.



battle, she had mobilized, without however declaring war. By September 30th, 250,000 Austro-German troops with 2000 guns were massed against the Serbian frontier. On October 11th this was crossed by the Bulgarians. From that date events moved with rapidity in a fashion to rule out the Dardanelles Expedition for good and all. New factors came into play. Serbia was overwhelmed. Direct railway communication was opened between Constantinople and Berlin. At a pinch troops and stores could be rushed faster from Germany to the Dardanelles than from Great Britain. Moreover, in view of the uncertain attitude of Greece, anxiety was felt for the safety of the small contingent of allied troops who had been landed, as a belated help to Serbia, at Salonica. The fall of M. Venizelos, and the pro-German attitude of the new Greek government rendered it of importance to overawe Greece and to bar her spacious and numerous harbours to the German submarines. Thus, with regard to the general situation, it became clear that the Dardanelles Force had outlived its sphere of usefulness. The original idea of reducing the forts under cover of the ships' guns had proved untenable. Apart from the danger of submarines hampering the action of the ships, the *technique* of defence had now developed sufficiently to cope even with monster howitzers. The Turks, taught by their German instructors to dig deep entrenchments, were able to sustain prolonged bombardments, the whole campaign had degenerated into a long drawn-out wearisome siege, using up troops and stores urgently needed elsewhere. So Lord Kitchener after personal inspection, with a heavy heart, pronounced the decision to evacuate.

Mr. Churchill finds a good deal of fault with this decision. In his words, "Not to persevere that was the crime." He goes on to make a pretty table illustrating the alleged dis-

advantages which this withdrawal caused us. We are told that the campaigns in Syria and Mesopotamia arose from the evacuation of the Dardanelles. "Instead of thrusting at Constantinople, the heart of Turkey, or striking at her arm-pit at Alexandretta, or her elbow at Haifa, we began our attack from her finger-tips upwards." But the truth was that responsible military authorities had had in the Dardanelles Expedition, an object-lesson in the way of the dangers of opening a campaign with no solid base behind them. A landing at Alexandretta or Haifa would only have resulted in a second Salonica Expedition, a semi-circle of troops around a harbour, pinned in with lines of entrenchments. One such experience was enough for any reasonable man. Whilst, as far as the Dardanelles Expedition was concerned, it must not be forgotten that at the time when the decision was taken to evacuate, the position of the force was desperate and had every prospect of becoming worse. The Navy was hampered in co-operation owing to danger of submarines, the stormy season was approaching, when it would become difficult to land stores or to evacuate the force if hard-pressed; moreover, the advantage in *terrain* was entirely with the enemy, who could overlook the whole of our lines, subject every part of these to sustained bombardment, and who had every prospect of being heavily reinforced with munitions and artillery. The British force, on the other hand, was divided into two isolated encampments, unable to co-operate if attacked, and, of very considerable importance, there were no "rest-camps" in which divisions which had been in action could refit. It is questionable if the British forces in the winter months could have held on to their lines against the greatly increased offensive power of the Turks, but it is quite certain that the effort to do this would have involved a continuous strain

upon our resources far in excess of any possible profit to our cause. Once the effort to break through to Constantinople had been recognized to be impossible owing to the enemy's increased strength, and the narrowness and difficulty of the theatre of operations, then the only sane policy was to evacuate, and to engage the enemy elsewhere. Mr. Churchill when he estimates that 12 British divisions were engaged in Syria and Palestine by the time of the Armistice, forgets that these were mostly Indian troops who would have been unsuitable for service on the Western Front.

The policy of knocking one's head against a brick wall is not to be recommended upon grounds of military wisdom. How bitterly Lord Kitchener felt the necessity of breaking off the enterprise has been placed sufficiently upon record by Sir George Arthur. But there are moments in the life of every great soldier when it is necessary to "cut losses." Wellington, Marlborough, Lee and Jackson, all had to face the necessity at some time or other, of breaking off an enterprise which seemed to afford no prospect of success, and of "finding a way round." The Syrian campaign was the way ultimately found around the Dardanelles.

The evacuation, once decided upon, was the most skilfully executed enterprise in the whole of the expedition. In fact it may be said that the best thing about the Adventure was the way in which it was broken off.

Summing up we may say that the Dardanelles Expedition began as a purely naval venture ; there developed the project of an army for "following up," this project of "following up" developed into a military attack, unexpectedly, after the fleet had tried and failed, this military attack came within an ace of success at Suvla Bay, the Expedition was finally withdrawn when the entry of Bulgaria into the war,

and the crushing of Serbia, had radically transposed the military situation in the Near East.

Meanwhile the work of expansion had proceeded apace. By the end of 1915, no less than 28 New Army divisions had been embarked for service, in France or upon other fronts, besides 12 divisions of Territorials.<sup>1</sup> The Expeditionary Force originally estimated at 160,000 men had expanded to 260,101 men with 9610 officers in France alone by December 1914 and to 951,028 with 35,161 officers by December 1915, exclusive of troops in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Salonica, etc., etc. The grand total including all these fronts was 1,309,110 men with 80,755 officers on December 1st, 1915. By October 1915 the Munitions problem had been virtually solved and from that time onwards the armies in the field became increasingly well supplied. Considerable embarrassment, however, was caused to Lord Kitchener by the wild and foolish outcry for conscription, raised principally by the Northcliffe Press. The Secretary of State had never concealed from himself that a measure of conscription would ultimately become necessary for raising the immense numbers of men required for the new armies. He had deliberately, however, refrained from advising a measure of conscription until trained and disciplined *cadres* had been established in which to absorb recruits, and had meant to choose his own moment for placing the issue before the country. Unhappily, even in the very midst of the Munitions Shortage, when we were actually unable to arm and to equip the men coming forward voluntarily, various stay-at-home military "experts," with more zeal than wisdom, thought the moment fit to bang the big drum and to raise clamorous voices for conscription. Colonel Repington writes, "I thought it best in Sir John's interest not to deal much

<sup>1</sup> Exclusive of Territorial divisions sent to India.

with affairs in France after this episode, and occupied myself mainly with following the terrible Russian campaign, and endeavouring to arouse people to the need for men and for compulsory service."

Lord Kitchener had by this time raised the number of divisions to be aimed at from 30 to 70, and had arranged with Mr. Henderson, who represented Labour in the Cabinet, "to ask early in 1916 for such legislation as would relieve our Commanders in the field from all further anxiety as to reinforcements."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Henderson had agreed, subject to the proviso that such conscription should be labelled as a special requirement and not as a policy, that the Labour Party would give support. In the midst of all this came Colonel Repington, with the whole Northcliffe Press behind him, banging on the journalistic drum, urging upon the Government a measure which it had actually decided to accept, and conducting its campaign with an intemperance of language and a disregard for the susceptibilities of its opponents which stung these into an equally intemperate opposition. The effect was disastrous. Conscription which it had been proposed to present to the country as a temporary measure dictated by urgent national need, became the shuttle-cock of political faction and of personal intrigue.

"I have been watching since January very carefully," said Kitchener later in 1916, "for the moment when it would be necessary to come forward, and it has been to me a most deplorable fact that this agitation has broken out, because whatever I say now, I do not speak with as much force as I should have done had this agitation not arisen."

There is no point upon which Lord Esher's *Tragedy of Lord Kitchener* makes more grotesque misrepresentations than with regard to the attitude of the Secretary of State

<sup>1</sup> Sir George Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, p. 315.

towards compulsory service. There was never the least doubt as to Kitchener's views on the subject. But it was one thing for the Secretary of State to come forward to a united country and to demand a measure of conscription as a measure essential to national salvation; and quite a different thing for him, as the Supreme Military Authority, to step down into a hotly contested political arena, and to attempt to coerce the civilian heads of the Government into a measure which they did not wish to accept and which was at variance with the pre-election pledges of some of the most influential members of the Cabinet. Nothing could have been more disastrous to the allied cause than to have given to the opponents of conscription so invaluable a war cry as "The army against the People." And it should not be forgotten in this connection that those two members of the Cabinet who were loudest and most determined in their advocacy of compulsory service, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill, were the very men who at the time of the incident of the Curragh Officers' mutiny in 1913, had raised the most vehement voices against any attempt at military dictation upon a political issue. Yet conscription, if a measure to achieve military ends, was certainly no less a political issue than the proposal to coerce Ulster. Once the Northcliffe Press had chosen to bring the question of conscription from the lofty level of national need down to the shallows of political faction, it became impossible for Lord Kitchener, a soldier clothed with responsible authority, to take an open part in political strife. It was for Lord Kitchener to state his requirements, and to tender his resignation, as he did on one occasion, should the Government be unwilling to give him the required support. But the Government must be left to find their own ways and means to provide the men and munitions demanded. This

was an attitude from which Lord Kitchener, once the matter had been reduced to a political issue, never wavered. It was an attitude which was eminently wise and proper. An English soldier, the chief military servant of a great democracy, could not play the rôle of a Ludendorff or of a Napoleon. That the politicians, unwilling to accept the responsibility for a measure bound to be highly controversial and unpopular, would have been glad to throw the *onus* upon Lord Kitchener, we may readily believe. We may safely assume that had he considered such an action politic, the Secretary of State for War would have accepted the responsibility and all the blame or unpopularity that might ensue. But the highest interests of the Crown and Constitution demanded that in the event of the question of conscription being a matter of controversy, the civilians should be left to decide this for themselves, and the appearance should be carefully avoided, that the country had been "dragooned" into conscription. For the rest it may fairly be pointed out that Lord Kitchener was no Winston Churchill to rush blindly in "where angels fear to tread."

A very able and experienced journalist has placed on record that "Reading the English newspapers in those early days of the war, with their stories of starving Germany, their atrocity-mongering, their wild perversion of truth, a journalist proud of his profession must blush for shame." <sup>1</sup>

Certainly the military "experts" employed by various newspapers perpetrated a most appalling amount of nonsense. Colonel Repington for instance, writing in *The Times* of October 30th, 1914, "The Germans have worked down to youths from the school, old gentlemen and hunchbacks . . ." was no worse than a good many others, yet it is significant that lack of knowledge, and a total misreading of

<sup>1</sup> Sir Philip Gibbs, *Adventures in Journalism*, p. 217.

the military situation, never hindered any of these gentlemen from setting their own judgment above that of the Secretary of State for War.

The Derby system, an inevitable preliminary to any scheme of compulsion, was attacked in the press as a half-measure designed to delude the public. The parrot-phrase "Equality of Sacrifice" completely begged the point as to how, in a great war, there *can* be any equality of sacrifice between the munitions-worker and the man taken by conscription to endure all the misery and hardship and danger of life in the trenches. Conscription with its long list of "exempted industries, with the opportunities it afforded for unfair practices of manifold art, was no doubt necessary and unavoidable once Governments and Peoples had lent themselves to the madness of war. But surely it is nonsense to write of it as a system which produced "equality of sacrifice"? The voluntary system at least only took men who were willing to go.

As we know, conscription was finally decided upon by the Cabinet, a decision which Kitchener welcomed and defended in the House of Lords. Put forward by the Government elected of the people, in the exercise of their constitutional functions, it was a decision which the country accepted without opposition. Yet it is worthy of comment that the monthly flow of recruiting under the Conscription Acts never exceeded the numbers obtained under voluntary service, and in many cases fell far below. Lord Esher's statement "Had the decision which was taken afterwards been taken then, victory might have been achieved at least a year sooner," is thus obviously absurd. Nor is his assertion that "No one who reads the confessions of Hindenburg and Ludendorff can come to any different conclusion," supported, so far as I have been able to discover, by anything



actually written by these authorities. On the contrary, it was not until October 1915 that the Munitions Problem had been sufficiently solved for us to be able to arm and equip the men we actually had in anything like a satisfactory manner. We certainly should not have been able to arm or to equip any greater numbers in 1915, even if we had had them. In 1915, moreover, German military power reached its high-water mark. The triumphant campaign in Russia had been followed by the campaign against Serbia. It is hard to see how conscription if adopted in England in 1915 could have altered these things. It was certainly not shortage in men or in Munitions which stood between us and victory at Loos. Bad leadership and wretched staff-work could not have been compensated for by conscription. And in 1916, by the time of the Battle of Verdun, conscription had already been adopted. Lord Esher would not appear to have troubled to consult any statistical material before hazarding this remarkable statement, nor would he appear, despite that he claims special knowledge, to be at all familiar with facts of the general military situation.<sup>1</sup>

The recall of Sir John French from the command in France and the appointment of Sir William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff brought the year 1915 to its close. French's recall was an inevitable sequence of the blundering which signified the Battle of Loos, and Robertson's appointment was a belated one. The system which had robbed Kitchener of every experienced staff-officer, had always been felt by the latter to be unfair and unsound. Sir James Wolfe-Murray had not shown the

<sup>1</sup> Even if, which is scarcely possible, the Somme offensive had been ready three months earlier, as a result of conscription, it would only have caught the Germans in the opening phases of their Verdun offensive and have led to troops being switched off from this. On the whole the Germans would have been the gainers.

qualities considered necessary by the Secretary of State for War at so trying an epoch. Kitchener is said to have announced to him curtly that he had decided to "make a change." Whilst a good deal of sympathy was felt for Murray, who had been in a difficult position, service opinion in general recognized in Robertson a better man.

The "bargain" between Kitchener and Robertson by which the latter took over certain clearly-defined functions within which the Secretary of State agreed to leave him a comparatively free hand, has been much commented upon, but it must be remembered that Kitchener was extremely dissatisfied with the work done by Robertson's predecessors, failures which had thrown an unfair burden upon his already over-burdened shoulders, and that the functions devolved appertained to an efficient chief-of-staff, i.e. the drawing up of plans of campaign, routine-work of issuing orders, etc. etc. The supreme control and direction of all military matters remained up to the day of his death in Kitchener's hands. In the instance which seldom occurred, in which he found himself in disagreement with Robertson, it was Kitchener who <sup>1</sup> finally assumed the responsibility for the decisions arrived at.

So the disastrous year 1915 wore to its close. The Dardanelles Expedition had fizzled out. Loos had been a story of tragic blundering. Russia had tasted deep of the dregs of humiliation and defeat. Yet on the balance, the year had been more fortunate to the Allies than to their enemies. Time had been gained. Russia, if on the verge of exhaustion, was fighting with stern determination. France was

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Repington, "Saw Sir William Robertson for the first time since he was installed as C.I.G.S. He told me that he had had to drop his first plans of being wholly independent of K. He now preferred to range up alongside Lord K., and to act with him." Vol. I, p. 97.

holding her own, and from end to end of Great Britain came the ceaseless tramp, tramp, tramp of armed men gathering for the fray. The cream of British manhood had shaken down under circumstances of infinite difficulty into trained and hardy troops. The call to join Kitchener's armies had brought forth all that was best in our race, and the great battles of the Somme were to write in letters of blood upon the records of time, the Apotheosis of Martyrdom and Self-Sacrifice: the Epic of the Disciplined Volunteer.

*Note to Chapter V*

LIMAN VON SANDERS ON THE DEFENCE OF  
THE DARDANELLES

The following quotations from Liman von Sanders' *Fünf Jahre Türkei* may serve as a wholesome corrective to the *obiter dicta* with which we are favoured by Mr. Winston Churchill in *The World Crisis*.

"As a leader of the First Army I had taken such measures as in the event of a possible break-through of the Anglo-French fleet to Constantinople, would, to say the very least, have rendered a long stay of the fleet before the capital a very difficult matter. From St. Stefano to the Sarail point, and then on the Asiatic side and on the Princes' Isles, numerous batteries were arranged, sweeping the sea with a cross-fire. Flying detachments kept watch along the stretches of coast mentioned. Reserves were held in readiness.

"Apart from this, it could be taken as a certainty that *Gæben* and *Breslau* with the Turkish fleet would have attacked the allied fleet in the Sea of Marmora, weakened as this

would have been in making the break-through, before this had ever reached Constantinople.

“In my opinion, even had the allied fleet been successful in breaking through the Dardanelles and victorious in a sea-fight in the Sea of Marmara, its position would have been scarcely tenable *unless the entire shore of the Straits of the Dardanelles were strongly occupied by enemy forces*. Should the Turkish troops be successful in holding their positions along the shores of the Straits, or should they be successful in recapturing these, then the necessary flow of supplies (Nachschub) through ships and colliers would be rendered impossible. Measures of defence taken, rendered a landing by troops near Constantinople, who might have lived on the country, almost without prospect of success.

“A decisive success could only be gained by the enemy if a landing by troops upon a great scale occurred either simultaneously with the break-through by the fleet or if it preceded this. A landing by troops following the break-through would have been obliged to renounce artillery support from the fleet which would have had to occupy itself with other tasks.

“A doubtful prospect to take possession of Constantinople by an Anglo-French fleet could at most be seen in a strong simultaneous Russian landing at the mouth of the Bosphorus and that Constantinople could be won in combined operations by the three allies.

“Measures, however, which appeared necessary had also been taken against a Russian landing. The Black Sea coast on both sides of the Dardanelles was also defended by batteries and flying detachments, whilst the 6th Army corps grouped around San Stephano stood in readiness to move against Russian landing troops. This army corps was

specially trained for this task . . . by various manœuvres” (pp. 65-66).

It is worthy of remark that the opinion of this German commander, a soldier of unquestioned ability and resource, absolutely coincides with that of the British Admiral Jackson, who wrote that the bombardment was not to be recommended unless a strong military force were to be in readiness to assist in the operation.

With regard to the evacuation we once more find German and British experts in agreement, viz. :

“At the end of November 1915, work was begun by the Fifth Army, upon plans for a great and powerful attack. It was the intention to break through a part of the enemy front by Ariburnu, and the right flank of his Anaforta front which joined on to this, and to force the outer parts of both these fronts to retreat. Reinforcements for this attack were to be provided by the Turkish headquarters from the Second Army. Technical troops were to be sent from Germany. . . . The enemy anticipated this attack by his timely retreat from the two northern fronts.

“As later became known the evacuation was finally decided upon by Lord Kitchener, who was at first a decided opponent of this measure. He himself was present upon all fronts in Gallipoli in November, and examined the positions of the attack and the prospects of their development. He decided to give up the attack and stated that the evacuation of the Peninsula would be possible without all too great loss. Other English leaders had considered that the evacuation could only be executed with great difficulty. Lord Kitchener was right.

“After the object of the Anaforta Landing had not been achieved there existed no prospect that the enemy . . . could bring the attack to a happy ending. The enemy

progress upon all fronts in the last weeks had been extremely little and dearly purchased with blood. All commanding heights remained in Turkish hands. For that reason the decision to abandon the attack was from the enemy standpoint, the best that could have been taken . . . even new reinforcements could scarcely have altered the turn of events after the way from the Central Powers to Turkey had become open" (p. 125).

Here we find the German commander, an expert of the highest standing possessed of a deep and intimate knowledge of the *terrain* and troops involved, and writing years after the event, expressing views which agree absolutely with those expressed by the British experts, viz., General Munroe and Lord Kitchener. We may fairly weigh this against the assertions put forward by Mr. Winston Churchill, a politician who had no personal knowledge of Gallipoli nor of the conditions there, and who is moreover more concerned to clear his own reputation from the very well-deserved criticisms brought by his countrymen, than to establish historical verity.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ARMIES OF THE SOMME

**I**T is a mistake very generally made to terminate the narrative of Lord Kitchener's services to his country with the tragedy of the *Hampshire*. Sir George Arthur in his Biography, cuts the story short where the icy waters of the North Sea closed over the head of the great soldier, and Lord Esher in his book takes the same line. Yet in truth Lord Kitchener's work lived after him. He had set into train a series of great events, which flowed upon one another like the seas of a rising tide, long after the spirit which had called them into being had passed into the silence and darkness of the stormy ocean. Of all the great tragedies of history surely there can be nothing so tragic as this death of the great War Minister, but a few short weeks before the mighty armies he had created were to undergo their first awful trial of strength with the foe. Yet surely no Greek hero of old had funeral games in honour of his soul of such grandeur as the thunder of the guns on the Somme and its long drawn-out epic of heroism and death.

Lord Kitchener's death occurred June 5th, 1916. On July 1st scarcely more than three weeks later, there opened the Battle of the Somme which proved to be the turning-point in the gigantic struggle between the Allies and Germany. The British Armies which fought on the Somme,

with all the machinery which stood behind them for expansion and reserves, formed the instrument forged by Lord Kitchener in the darkest and dreariest days of the War. They were the Kitchener Armies, his handiwork concerning which he neither asked nor took counsel of another man. By July 1916, the British Expeditionary Force in France had been brought up from its pre-war estimated strength of 160,000 men to 1,483,915; the Air Force from a total of 1700 officers and men in August 1914 had been expanded into 35,819. Other special corps had been expanded proportionately. It must be remembered that this gigantic expansion had taken place within less than two years—twenty-three months to be exact, and in face of shortages and difficulties of all kinds. Although during the last quarter of 1917 the British Expeditionary Force in France reached its highest figure, round two million men, the ratio of expansion between 1,483,915 and 2,000,000 is nothing like the ratio of expansion between 160,000 and 1,483,915. Moreover, all the machinery for raising and training troops had already been set up by Lord Kitchener. So far as physique and sheer quality of daring and heroism is concerned the armies of the Somme certainly formed the high-water mark of British military achievement. The armies which came after fought well and had the advantage of a *technique* in war learnt by bitter experience. But they never had the superb dash and daring, the utter contempt for death shown by the troops who fought on the Somme.

The six divisions of the original B.E.F. had expanded into 55 by the time of this battle. Whereas Sir John French had commanded three army-corps, Sir Douglas Haig commanded four "armies" containing a varying number of corps each with two or three divisions.

It is not without interest to compare the results obtained



by Lord Kitchener within twenty-three months of warfare with those obtained within a similar period by the Northern and Southern States during the American Civil War. The Army of the Potomac in March 1863 numbered 130,000 men, a ratio of expansion to the original regular force of 16,000, slightly less than the ratio of expansion from the original B.E.F. to the Somme armies. Grant had at that time about 60,000 men and there were some 20,000 men at New Orleans, a grand total of 210,000. Adding troops upon lines of communication, the number of *field*-troops might be estimated at a grand total of 300,000. The grand total of British Expeditionary Forces in July 1916 was 1,951,606. The Northern States had a white population of about 31,445,089, slightly more than two-thirds of the population of the United Kingdom in the Great War. Within nearly two years of war, they furnished as expeditionary forces less than one-sixth of the troops placed in the field by Lord Kitchener from the Empire as a whole, and less than one-fifth of the numbers supplied by the United Kingdom for the Expeditionary Force in France.

The Southern States with a population one-third as large as that of the North raised greater armies in proportion to their inferior resources. Lee opposed Hooker with 62,000 men, Longstreet's detached corps numbered 15,000, a total of 77,000.<sup>1</sup> The armies in the West numbered perhaps 50,000, and there were troops detached upon lines of communication, etc., which may have brought the grand total to about 180,000. But in neither North nor South was there anything like the intensive expansion of fighting strength in proportion to population which occurred in Great Britain from 1914-16. Perhaps this may serve to explain the absence of any great munitions difficulty from

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Henderson's *Stonewall Jackson*.

the records of the struggle in America. Rapid as was the growth of the Union Armies they never outstripped the power of the Northern manufacturers to provide them with guns and rifles or with shot and shell.

Comparison has already been made between the ratio and volume of the expansion of the United States armies subsequent to her entry into the World-War, and the results attained by Lord Kitchener. The American system was very extravagant in men. In November 1918 with a total ration strength of 1,924,000 the *rifle* strength was only 322,000. The rifle strength of the B.E.F. in France at the end of eighteen months of war was twice as high. The American system would not seem to have worked well in practice. We are inclined to feel that they would have obtained more useful results had they relied upon voluntary service, and got the *cream* of American manhood into their ranks.

Certainly, however, Lord Kitchener's feat in raising the armies of the Somme is a feat which stands unrivalled and unsurpassed. History affords no record of an Army raised at shorter notice or under more disadvantageous circumstances or pitted against a more highly trained and formidable adversary. General Sixt von Arnim's report may be quoted as being the cool appreciation of a military expert of the highest standing, writing not for propaganda purposes nor for publication, but as giving instructions to his troops for use in battle against the Kitchener Armies :

“ The English infantry has undoubtedly learnt much since the Autumn offensive. . . . The Englishman also has his physique and his training in his favour. One must acknowledge, however, the skill with which the English rapidly consolidate captured positions. . . . The English infantry showed great tenacity in defence. . . . All our tactically-

important positions were methodically bombarded by the English Artillery. . . . Registration and fire-control were assisted by well-organized aerial observation. . . . The number of our battle-planes was far too small. The enemy's airmen were often able to fire successfully on our troops with machine-guns, by descending to the height of a few hundred metres." The German General terms this an "astonishingly bold procedure."

Within less than two years of warfare we find the new British Armies frankly admitted to be an enemy to be reckoned with on even terms, and in this the German General does less than full justice to the effect upon the *moral* of the German troops of the long drawn-out, sustained and bloody offensive of the British Armies.

That the British offensive on the Somme attained successes as far exceeding anything officially admitted by the Germans may be illustrated by a graphic phrase from Hindenburg's *Out of My Life* describing his earliest impressions on assuming command.

"On the Somme the struggle had now been raging two months. There we passed from one crisis to another. Our lines were permanently in a condition of the highest tension." In Buchan's phrase, "The Battle of the Somme fulfilled the Allied purpose in taxing to the uttermost the German War machine. It tried the Command, it tried the nation at home, and it tried to the last limit of endurance the men in the line. The place became a name of terror, though belittled in *communiqués* and rarely mentioned in the Press, it was a word of ill-omen to the whole German people."<sup>1</sup>

To the German troops, the battle became known as "The Hell on the Somme" and the "Blood-Bath." The

<sup>1</sup> Holt's translation, p. 164. Buchan, *The Battle of the Somme*.

effect upon the enemy's *moral* was enormous. Division after division was drawn back shattered from the lines. The situation became so serious that Hindenburg and Ludendorff regarded the prospect of the battle being renewed in the following Spring, and, in all probability to the accompaniment of a simultaneous Russian offensive, with grave misgiving. The decision to evacuate a considerable sector of the line of defence, and the building of the Hindenburg line, was an eloquent testimony to the deep respect which British courage and British science had imposed upon the enemy. And yet, whilst making every allowance for the grim determination with which the attack was carried out over a period involving many months of fighting, whilst paying every tribute to the magnificent valour and heroic self-sacrifice displayed by the British troops involved, it may well be doubted whether the British armies in this great battle achieved the vast results which *might* have been achieved. Sir Douglas Haig in his Despatches terms the terrific fighting on the Somme, the "Opening of the Wearing-Out Battle." The phrase is illuminating as illustrative of a certain frame of mind in the British Higher Command. Repington quotes a conversation with Brigadier-General Charteris, at the time in charge of British Intelligence, which defined the object of the battle as "to kill Germans." Charteris had no doubt accepted the phrase from his superiors. There is, expressed in the Battle of the Somme as in the Flanders offensive which succeeded it, a certain theory of war, prettily camouflaged in such phrases as "War of Attrition" and "*Combat d'Usure*" but the Anglo-Saxon of which is simply "slogging." "Slogging" comprises the entire renunciation of any attempt to achieve victory in war by means of surprise or manœuvre, and to confine one's efforts to assembling masses of heavy guns, and material of

war of all kinds, concentrating in a leisurely fashion, chivalrously giving the enemy every possible warning of one's intention, division upon division of infantry, and to hurling these after a bombardment lasting sometimes for weeks, at the enemy. And this process once begun, to be continued for months on end, careless of the heavy losses it entailed, under the theory that it meant "killing Germans." That this system carried out by a man of iron will and possessed of lavish resources did affect the enemy's *moral* is unquestionable, but certainly it never produced anything like the effect upon the enemy's *moral* of the great attack of August 8th, 1918, in which, almost for the first time in the war, a British attack was carried out, with *brains* as well as with brute strength behind it.

Von Hindenburg writes: "If our western <sup>and</sup> adversaries failed to obtain any decisive results in the battles from 1915 to 1917 it must mainly be ascribed to a certain unimaginativeness in their generalship. The necessary superiority in men, war material and ammunition was certainly not lacking, nor can it be suggested that the quality of the enemy troops would not have been high enough to satisfy the demands of a more vigorous and ingenious leadership." The latter phrase makes it clear that it is mainly the British army which Hindenburg has in mind, and is an eloquent testimony to the qualities of the new armies. It may be said in fact that on the Somme as in Flanders, the British citizen turned soldier, the temporary officers who commanded battalions and brigades, rose magnificently to the occasion, and division for division, the British armies were not merely equal to the Germans but superior. Where failure occurred it was in the higher commands, in particular it was the regular officer who wrote p.s.c. against his name who too often displayed a sheer mental sluggishness, a narrowness in

scope and outlook, which meant in practice that the new armies were forced to lavish blood like water to gain objectives of minor importance, and which could have been achieved at one tithe of the cost.

Here is the considered judgment of a very able staff-officer, "After Neuve Chapelle our General Staff apparently abandoned the theory that surprise in attack was possible in a modern war of position. The most we could expect to do would be to keep the hour of attack, and possibly the date secret. As for the location of the attack it would be impossible to conceal that from the enemy. They were bound to get to know of it.

"Well, in the course of time, a certain Ludendorff rather upset this theory by inflicting on us, one memorable March day, a complete surprise between St. Quentin and La Fère. . . . I say having full regard for the nature of the assertion . . . that the power to inflict such surprise in attack, the power to obviate in some measure such frightful plodding murder as that of Paschendæle lay with our General Staff from the Autumn of 1916 onwards . . . we had almost every idea first but systematically waited for the enemy to apply such ideas before venturing in his wake. . . .

"On the Staff in France, changing for dinner while others were waist-deep in mud or dying on patrol was *de rigueur*. Sinking everything, corps, etiquette, tradition, personalities and all the rest, in order to achieve a grand transcending, surprise in attack—that was not considered necessary. Operations, Intelligence, Adjutant-General's branch, Signals, and 'Q'—all had their own axes to grind, their own spheres to swell in, and refused to get together lest an amalgamation should curb their powers and infringe their departmental rights. No one branch of the Staff would suffer itself to be dictated to by another branch, and

the person who should have dictated to the whole lot in this vital matter did not do so.”<sup>1</sup>

The person who should have dictated to the whole lot was Sir Douglas Haig himself, and however much we may admire the indomitable courage and tenacity displayed by the British Commander-in-Chief, it must be conceded, that not until the very end, not until Ludendorff's sledge-hammer blows had sent the British Armies reeling back in ruin before him, would he appear to have awakened to the fact that there was something radically wrong with the staff-work of the British Armies. A considerable number of temporary officers were then introduced. The Commander-in-Chief, however, can scarcely be held free from blame for the very unsatisfactory system which had obtained heretofore.

After all, the General Headquarters of an army in the field are not expected to produce the atmosphere of well-bred ease of a fashionable London Club. The phrase “War of Attrition” was first coined by the American General Grant during the American Civil War. But Grant, at least, refrained in his own person, and in the persons of his Staff, from anything approaching to “fal-lals” or “trimmings.”

Lord Kitchener at all events waged war in a different fashion. His Headquarters in Egypt as in South Africa were models of simplicity and he had no love for an unwieldy staff. He carefully refrained from giving employment to a single man whose services could by any possibility be dispensed with. Nor was he ever in favour of a policy of prolonged bombardments which served little purpose save to advertise to the enemy our intention to make an attack. And he was a very firm believer in the value of secrecy and surprise. His message to Colonel Dallas on October 5th is worthy of comment. “Warn everybody to keep movement

<sup>1</sup> Tuohy, *The Secret Corps*, p. 219.

of troops absolutely secret. Try and bring off a complete or partial surprise on enemy's left ; for this purpose movement of troops from sea-coast should be as much as possible at night. Am sending flying squadron, which will I hope, protect troops from too inquisitive enemy's aircraft."

There is here a conception of warfare absent from the British Headquarters until after the disastrous battles of Spring 1918. Equally luminous were the Secretary of State's comments on the use of artillery. To a Staff-officer from Sir John French he said, "Why don't you try an attack with a *shorter* artillery preparation ?"

Writing of an episode on the West Front at the end of 1916, Hindenburg says : "For this attack the French Commander had abandoned the former practice of an artillery preparation extending over days or even weeks. . . . We had already had experience of this enemy method of preparation for the attack in the course of the long attrition battles, but as the herald to a great infantry attack it was a novelty to us, and it was perhaps just this feature which doubtless produced so important a success . . . . *We could only hope that in the coming year he would not repeat the experiment on a greater scale and with equal success.*"<sup>1</sup>

It is significant of Lord Kitchener's uncanny knack of seeing into the heart of a problem, that as far back as 1915 he had realized the possibilities opening before a commander who followed up a short but intense bombardment by an immediate infantry attack. Unhappily it was counsel which fell upon deaf ears, and which not only fell upon deaf ears but which was actually used to perpetrate the ridiculous legend that Lord Kitchener did not understand the use of artillery in modern war.

The sorry picture drawn by a very able officer attached to

<sup>1</sup> My italics.



Sir Douglas Haig's personal staff, of a General Staff filled with pettiness and departmental jealousies and obstinately refusing "to get together lest an amalgamation should curb their powers and infringe their departmental rights," dressing for dinner whilst other men were wading waist-deep in mud or dying on patrol, may serve to cast a luminous picture of the atmosphere actually prevailing at the War Office when Lord Kitchener became Secretary of State for War. This was a General Staff actually within face of the enemy, and after two years of bloody war.

The elderly Generals running the War Office machine at the outbreak of the war were infinitely worse. It is difficult to imagine how the new armies could ever have been brought into being had a lesser personality than Kitchener been made Chief, and but for the whirlwind methods he introduced. We may take this story told by Sir Charles Callwell. ". . . one guessed that explanations would not be sympathetically received by the Secretary of State, and that it would be wisest to take the rebuke 'lying down'; he expected things to be done right and that was all about it. . . . One day he sent for me and directed me to carry out a certain measure in connection with a subject that was not my business at all, and I was so ill-advised as to say, 'It's a matter for the Adjutant-General's Department, sir, but I'll let them know about it.' 'I told you to do it yourself,' snapped the Chief in a very peremptory tone."<sup>1</sup> Compare it with this. "As far back as 1916 it was pointed out that the enemy was obtaining invaluable information by overhearing our signal traffic—i.e., telephone conversations, morse-telegraphy and wireless. 'Civilian' brains appealed for some form of co-ordination between R.E. Signals, R.F.C. wireless, and the General Staff Intelligence, so that all

<sup>1</sup> *Experiences of a Dug-Out*, p. 47.

traffic might be controlled. For two years a paper discussion went on round detail, such as whether a wireless operator should belong to Signals or to Intelligence ; months passed in circulating files to all concerned, and all the time the enemy was reading our signal traffic, and British soldiers were dying in thousands as a direct result. . . . Eventually, instead of a virile policy dictated by the extreme urgency of the case, one of ' peaceful penetration ' was decided on by G.H.Q. by which an officer, Captain S., was deputed to try and make Signals realize, by the exercise of his own personal charm and tact (this actually figured in an official document) how they were playing into the enemy's hands." <sup>1</sup>

With departments indulging in this sort of foolery, surely there was much to be said in favour of Kitchener's policy of calling upon the man whom he thought most suitable and telling him to do the job irrespective of whatever department he happened to belong to. Certainly we cannot conceive of Lord Kitchener as Commander-in-Chief in the field, allowing the enemy the inestimable advantage of reading his signal traffic, for sheer lack of will-power to make the departments cease their wrangling.

The reason why the Battle of the Somme, despite the lavish outlay in blood, in men, and munitions, failed to bring anything in the nature of a decisive victory to the British Armies, may perhaps be disclosed in the following :

" G.H.Q. seemed to think in 1915-17, that stamping everything ' Secret, documents, envelopes, maps, was all that was necessary to keep our battle intentions secret.

" How could they be secret when in the projected area of operations we were building new roads and battery positions beneath the Fokker and the Albatross ? When we were registering new batteries by wireless every day, and omitting

<sup>1</sup> Tuohy, *The Secret Corps*, p. 218.

to change, or in any way control, our wireless call signs so that the Germans, by intercepting our messages, knew of every fresh battery that we brought up? When we constructed additional casualty clearing stations, and dumps, and hutments, in the zone behind where we proposed attacking? When our reconnaissance and photographing machines were concentrated in one specific zone? When our signal traffic was allowed to increase in volume locally out of all proportion to other normal sectors of the front? When the whole rearward zone of our contemplated attack was literally crisscrossed with Decauville light railways? *When movement of troops and transport was permitted by day, and also train-movement?*<sup>1</sup> When an advanced G.H.Q. was planted down weeks beforehand behind the very sector where we proposed attacking, for all the world to note, when . . . but one could go on indefinitely.

“We wrote our intentions on the ground, in the air, everywhere, but we changed for dinner.”

The failure of Lord Haig to make the best use of the tanks to deliver a decisive blow in the closing phases of the Battle of the Somme has been often commented upon, yet it is a failure but symptomatic of a military policy which rejected everything in the way of strategy or surprise in favour of a preconceived theory of “wearing-down” the enemy by sheer brute force. The net results of five months of fighting on the Somme carried out by an Army which must be considered to be one of the very finest, if not *the* finest, fighting machines ever devised by the wit of man, was that the German line was dented in to the most four miles upon a front of thirteen. We took 38,000 prisoners. The Germans, attacking along the same ground in March 1918, within fifteen days took back all they had lost, swept

<sup>1</sup> My italics, *vide* Kitchener’s warning to move troops by night.

up to the very threshold of Amiens, and took 90,000 prisoners besides. A great deal of special pleading has been brought forward to explain away this difference in achievements. It has been said, quite truly, that the Germans were superior in numbers. They were not more superior in numbers than the British on the Somme in 1916. It has been said that the British in 1918 held too long a line. The line was not longer than that held in 1916 by the enemy. It has been said the British Army had been weakened by the Flanders offensive and that Mr. Lloyd George's Government had been unwilling to furnish the new drafts necessary to replace losses. If this is true, and there would seem to be some truth in it, the doctrine of "wearing out" would appear in practice to have led to "wearing out" our own troops rather quicker than those of the enemy, and to making demands upon the Government at home which were found difficult to fulfil. But if we avoid patriotic camouflage and look facts in the face, the real cause of the disaster would seem to be simply this: that the enemy fought better than we did. They fought better than we did, not in the sense that they were braver—no troops could have displayed more desperate courage than the British forces engaged—but in the sense that they were much more skilfully led. The British General Staff were completely deceived as to the direction of the enemy's stroke, nor did they show any great elasticity in rising to the height of the occasion of the German attack when this finally developed with overwhelming force and fury in an unexpected direction.

Sir Philip Gibbs writes, speaking of a visit to St. Quentin, on the very eve of the great German attack: <sup>1</sup>

"I looked about for trench systems, support lines, and

<sup>1</sup> *Realities of War*, p. 402.

did not see them, and wondered what our defence would be if the enemy attacked there in great strength. . . . 'What do you think about this German Offensive?' I asked the General of a London Division (General Gorrings of the 47th) standing on a waggon and watching a tug-of-war. . . .

"'G.H.Q. has got the wind up,' he said. 'It is all bluff.'"

When the attack came, ". . . I am convinced," writes Sir John Monash who commanded the Australian Army Corps, "that the recoil—which may have been inevitable at first by reason of the intensity of the German attack, and because the defensive organization of the Fifth Army had been unduly attenuated—was allowed to extend over a much greater distance, and to continue for longer in point of time, than ought to have been the case.

"Between Albert and St. Quentin there were in existence several lines of defence, which by reason of their topographical features, or the existence of trenches and entanglements, were eminently suitable for making a stand. Yet no stand was made, at any rate upon a broad front, because there was no co-ordination in the spasmodic attempts to do so." <sup>1</sup>

The British attack on the Somme in 1916 was made under conditions very different to those under which the Germans made theirs in 1918. Every possible warning was given to the enemy as to our intentions. Even had the activity opposite the sector chosen for attack, carried out without attempt at concealment or *camouflage* under the watchful eyes of enemy aeroplanes, failed to give warning of our intentions, the prolonged bombardment, lasting for upwards of a week, could scarcely have failed to do so. Had the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army inserted an advertisement in all the newspapers of the world, announcing his intention to attack the German lines at the place and

<sup>1</sup> *The Australian Victories in France*, p. 23.

date chosen, the effect could scarcely have been more disastrous. It is probable that the enemy would have regarded it as an ingenious *ruse* and have disregarded it. But with the attack as actually made, the British troops swept forward to attack an enemy ready and waiting for them, and whose only miscalculation lay in that they had underestimated the offensive power of the newly formed British Armies, the valour and dash of the British Infantry, the skill and accuracy of the British Artillery, and the deadly combination of Aerial observation and fire from the ground. But the attack lacked every element of surprise.

“When our Infantry attacked at Gommecourt and Beaumont, Hamel and Thiepval, they were received by waves of machine-gun bullets fired by men who, in spite of the ordeal of our seven days’ bombardment, came out into the open now, at the moment of attack which they knew through their periscopes was coming. They brought their guns above the shell-craters of their destroyed trenches and served them. They ran forward even into No Man’s Land, and planted their machine-guns there, and swept down our men as they charged. Over their heads the German gunners flung a frightful barrage, ploughing gaps in the ranks of our men.”<sup>1</sup>

Repington describing a visit to the Army during the Somme battle writes: “. . . I was very much surprised to find our Artillery had all the fun to itself. I have never seen such inequality of artillery since the old Natal days, and I cannot swear that a single German shell came over us while the mass of our Artillery was hard at work.”

It is interesting to compare this with Gibbs’ description quoted above and with the awful price actually paid by the British Army for victory. It seems strange that it should

<sup>1</sup> Gibbs, *Realities of War*, p. 343.

never have occurred to this "expert" to wonder that the actual results attained by this superiority in artillery were, comparatively speaking, so poor. In view of the fact that no writer during the war did more to put forward the wrong and mischievous view that the heavy casualties and comparative failure of the British offensive at Neuve Chapelle and Festubert were due to lack of artillery support, wilfully withheld by Lord Kitchener, the Battle of the Somme might well have opened his eyes upon the subject. Attacking with immense superiority in artillery, and lavish supplies of H.-E. shell, supposed to be an infallible recipe for victory, the British Armies came no nearer to achieving really great and decisive tactical advantages, and paid an even bloodier price for the minor successes made, than in the offensives at Neuve Chapelle and Festubert, in which, to quote Colonel Repington's words, ". . . the want of an unlimited supply of high-explosive shells was a fatal bar to our success."

It is interesting in this connection to compare the casualty lists for four months' fighting in the Somme offensive, and the period in which, according to "experts" of the type of Colonel Repington, lack of heavy guns and high-explosive shell meant "murder" to our troops on the West Front.

For July, August, October, and November 1916, the British Expeditionary Force in France with a total strength of 1,483,915, lost 498,058 officers and men, a proportion of roughly speaking, 33 per cent. For March, April, May and June 1915, the B.E.F. from a total strength of 603,803 lost 130,186 men, a proportion of roughly less than 20 per cent. We reach the quite astonishing result that at a time when our troops were lavishly supplied with heavy guns and ammunition, attack proved to be very much more costly than at a time when, as is alleged, we were greatly inferior in those respects to the enemy. The truth was, of course,

that high-explosive shell proved a comparative failure. By tearing up huge craters where it burst, even when it was successful in cutting the enemy's wire, it merely interposed one obstacle in place of another. After prolonged pounding by big-calibre H.-E. shell the ground was reduced to a mass of shell-holes, presenting an insuperable difficulty to the movement of troops and guns. Not until the tank appeared on the scene was the difficulty even partially obviated.

The tendency of a certain class of British Staff Officer to get hold of some dimly-comprehended French phrase and to worry the unfortunate thing to death, has never been more strikingly illustrated than by Colonel Boraston and by A. B. Dewar in their work *Sir Douglas Haig's Command 1915-1918*. Phrases such as *Combat d'Usure*, *bataille d'Usure*, are so perpetually flung at our heads, that we come to feel rather doubtful as to whether the authors themselves clearly grasp all that these words imply. *Combat d'Usure* is, of course, nothing more than the French translation of Grant's *War of Attrition*. The classic instance of a *Combat d'Usure* in which both sides were fairly evenly balanced in courage and resources is the case of the Kilkenny Cats. We are informed by historians that the infuriated felines "used one another up" to the extent of leaving only their tails behind them. Whether one tail was half an inch longer than the other, history omits to inform us. Now the truth about Sir Douglas Haig's "Wearing Out" battle was that it came perilously near to ending in the manner of the Kilkenny Cats.

Here we have a candid opinion from a very able and experienced observer. "The battles of Flanders ended with the capture of Passchendaele by the Canadians, and that year's fighting on the Western Front cost us 800,000 casualties, and though we had dealt the enemy heavy blows from



which he reeled back, the drain on our man-power was too great for what was to happen next year, and our men were too sorely tried. For the first time the British Army lost its spirit of optimism, and there was a sense of deadly depression among many officers and men with whom I came in touch. They saw no ending of the war, and nothing except continuous slaughter, such as that in Flanders."

In comparison with this we may quote Ludendorff: "The fifth act of the great drama in Flanders opened on the 22nd of October. Enormous masses of ammunition such as the human mind had never imagined before the war, were hurled upon the bodies of men who passed a miserable existence scattered about in mud-filled shell-holes. The horror of the shell-hole area of Verdun was surpassed. It was no longer life at all. It was mere unspeakable suffering. And through this world of mud the attackers dragged themselves, slowly but steadily in dense masses. Caught in the advanced zone by our hail of fire they often collapsed, and the lonely man in the shell-hole breathed again. Then the mass came on again. Rifle and machine-gun jammed with mud. Man fought against man, and only too often the mass was successful. . . . On the 26th and 30th October and 6th and 10th November the fighting was again of the severest description. The enemy charged like a wild bull against the iron wall. . . . He threw his weight against Houthoult Forest, Poelcapelle, Passchendaele, Becelaere, Gheluvelt, and Zandvoovde. He dented it in many places and it seemed as if he must knock it down. But it held although a faint tremor ran through its foundation."

Great as was the effect of the Flanders fighting on the enemy's *moral*, the effect of the swift sudden blow at Cambrai on the 20th November 1917 was infinitely greater. We may quote again from Ludendorff: "It was not until noon that

I obtained a clear idea of the extent of the enemy's success. It made me very anxious. . . . *The English Army Commander did not exploit his great initial success, or we should not have been able to limit the extent of the gap.*<sup>1</sup> If he had done so what would have been the judgment on the Italian campaign?" The British Staff, making its usual muddle of things, not only failed to follow up the brilliant success gained, but even omitted necessary measures to consolidate the ground won, with the result that a skilfully conceived and vigorously executed German counter-attack ultimately restored the balance, inflicting a humiliating reverse on the British arms. Not even the authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command* are able to resist the conclusion that on this occasion "the thinking side had exhausted its ingenuity."<sup>2</sup>

Some explanation of the deplorable staff-work which so often robbed the British Armies of victory when, as at Cambrai, the sun of hope burned brightly overhead, is of course to be found in the fact that British regular staff-officers before the war had had no practice in handling great bodies of men. Generals who in time of peace had never seen a unit higher than a division, found themselves by the time of the Battle of the Somme in command of "armies" numbering from ten to twelve such units. Still, this was after nearly two years of war, and a few months of actual war, in the presence of the enemy, were worth many years of training in time of peace. Many of the mistakes made by regular officers trained at Camberley and Quetta were of a surprisingly elementary description, thus the battle of Loos was ruined by a mistake in timing the marches of the reserve divisions, a mistake to parallel which it would be necessary to go back to the early days of the American Civil War, when the armies were mere mobs and generals mainly

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I, p. 396.

civilians suddenly pitch-forked into responsible military commands. For divisions to be bewildered by contradictory orders, "jammed up" by failure to apportion out roads for "approach-marches," etc., etc., might be pardonable enough in the case of a staff of amateur soldiers; in the case of professionals such blunders were inexcusable. The fact cannot be ignored that the Canadian and Australian Army-Corps, staffed almost entirely by temporary officers, were not merely equal but actually superior to the other British troops as far as staff-work was concerned. And yet staff-work might reasonably be expected to be the weakest point of hastily-raised troops such as these. The transport arrangements, pioneer work, etc., for the Army as a whole, being in the hands of civilians, functioned admirably from the very first. The failure was with the combatant troops, the staff-work for whom was in the hands of a solid phalanx of regular officers. No doubt much of the unevenness which existed with regard to staff-work between divisions, army-corps and armies, was due to the fact that appointments on the staff went by sheer favouritism. Every general appointed such staff-officers as seemed good in his own eyes, the staff was the mirror of the general, and when the general was changed, his staff usually went with him. Thus an incompetent general had an incompetent staff, and vice versa. There was no such thing as a certain general level of staff-work throughout the Army. Whereas some armies such as the Second were noticeably good, other armies such as the Fifth were noticeably bad. It was the Fifth Army, it may be remarked, which broke before the German onslaught in March 1918. It had achieved a very general reputation for inefficiency before then.

To quote again from Tuohy: "It is far from the writer's purpose to develop a sneer at the expense of the regular-

turned staff-officer. If there were fools on the staff, and there were; if there were 'outsiders' and there were; if there were 'chocolate officers' and there were; if there were 'dug-ins' and there were—taken as a body of men into whose safe-keeping had been committed the lives of millions of others, their compatriots, officers on the General Staff, worked as hard as most others in the war. They worked most of them to the very best of their ability . . . to the best of their ability. . . .

“If staff-work might have been better, criticism should be deflected from the individual to the system and those that fostered the system. . . . According to the tenets of General Staff organization, originally drawn up shortly after the Crimean War, every staff-officer must be able to carry out the functions of each or any of the four branches of the General Staff, viz. :—Intelligence (finding out all about the enemy); Operations (planning operations against the enemy); Adjutant-General's Branch (general control of the troops); Quartermaster-General's Branch (supplies). The system further ordained that staff-officers were to rotate from one of these appointments to the other, which is not far short of asking a man in civil life to be one day a lawyer, the next an actor, the next a clergyman, and the next a butcher. Still this was the system which governed our battles in France. No specializing. No matter how brilliant an officer might be at Intelligence work, he was liable next day to be counting carcasses at Havre, and vice versa. . . . While there was a war on, these staff-officers had to be trained in the various branches of staffwork.”

The expansion of the army tenfold within two years meant, of course, a proportionate increase in staffs. There being no time to put temporary officers through all the elaborate training deemed necessary for a staff-officer, practi-

cally all staff-appointments went to regular officers. The peace-training of these officers, however, had altogether failed to conceive of a war of such magnitude and fought under such conditions as the struggle upon which we were engaged. Thus much of the value of the peace-time training of these staff-officers was discounted by the new conditions. Some individuals rose brilliantly to the occasion, others did fairly well, whilst others again, and these unfortunately a very large proportion, proved hopeless failures. The problem was complicated by the element of favouritism already dwelt upon. The remedy of course would have been to simplify the course of training for staff-officers, and to have introduced "New Army" men with special qualifications. This was actually done in the Australian and Canadian Corps. But it needed the disasters of March and April, 1918, to open Sir Douglas Haig's eyes to the fact that the regular staff-officer could be usefully supplemented from the New Armies.

It is an interesting and fascinating speculation as to how the Somme battle would have been fought had not the tragedy of the *Hampshire* occurred, and if we can conceive of a British Government possessed of sufficient wisdom and insight to realize that Lord Kitchener's work at the War Office was practically done, and to have urged him to accept the command in France. Lord French in a footnote to "1914" writes: "I do not think Lord Kitchener was always credited by the country with the talent for command in the field which I know he really possessed." He relates how upon the outbreak of the war he went to Kitchener and urged that he (Kitchener) should ask for the command in France, with himself (French) as Chief-of-Staff. Lord Kitchener declined to do so. Nevertheless, a certain fear that Lord Kitchener would ultimately assume the command in

France seems to have lurked in French's mind to such an extent that, as said, the Secretary of State for War sent a special messenger over to reassure him. The tribute to Lord Kitchener as a general in the field is, however, striking and worthy of comment as coming from a commander who served under him in South Africa, and who can hardly be taken as a friendly critic. Had Lord Kitchener assumed the command in the field at the time of the July offensive of the Allies in France, it is by no means certain that he would have chosen the Somme region as being the most suitable for an offensive stroke, but it is quite certain that the battle wherever fought would have been waged in a very different fashion. We can hardly conceive of Lord Kitchener as tolerating the jealousies and dissensions in G.H.Q. which did so much to weaken the force of Haig's blows. We may recall Sir Charles Callwell's phrase, "he expected things to be done right and that was all about it." We can hardly conceive of the man who had written to Dallas, "Try and bring off a complete or partial surprise," deliberately eliminating all element of surprise from the attack. As little can we conceive of the commander of whom Lord French has written, "He seemed to think we were extravagant with ammunition" as indulging in a seven-days' bombardment of the enemy's trenches before launching the attack. We may recall, moreover, Lord Kitchener's warning as to moving troops by night. We are entitled to deduce from all this that a Battle of the Somme fought by Lord Kitchener in 1916 would have been a blow similar to that struck by Ludendorff almost on the same ground in 1918. We should have seen a swift secret massing of guns and troops opposite the sector of attack chosen, two or three hours of intense bombardment, and then an attack made with relentless vigour and force. With the example, quoted by Hindenburg, of

what the French accomplished using similar tactics on a small scale, it can hardly be doubted but that such an attack would have been successful. If not a decisive "break-through," at the very least we should have seen the German line bent so far back, and their entire military situation put into such jeopardy, that they would have been unable to spare troops for their offensive in Roumania, and the "rolling up" of their Russian flank would have produced incalculable results to the Allies.

But in 1916, with the prevailing theories of "wearing-out" and the tendency to rely upon *materiel* it would have needed a very "big" man on the Allied side to conceive such tactics and to carry them through; some touch of the divine fire of genius, some element of true greatness of soul, some spark of personal magnetism kindling men to enthusiasm and inspiring confidence in victory. Such men are rarely born, and it happens still more rarely that they are put in authority at the precise psychological moment to play the part of a Lee, of a Stonewall Jackson, or of a Wellington. On the British side there was but the one man, truly qualified in the greatness of his achievements and of his soul, to join the Valhalla of Great Captains who have wrought mighty deeds of arms since the dawn of time. And when the New Armies leapt forward to the Blood-Bath, and Heroism and Butchery of the Somme, the far-seeing intellect which had called them into being, the master-hand trained in all the cunning of war, which would have been of all others the most fit and proper to have guided them, had made the Supreme Sacrifice. Did he look down upon that senseless butchery? Did he ever groan in spirit as the fine flower of British manhood went joyously to death, and staff-officers remote from all the destruction and slaughter, talked complacently of "killing Huns"? Or did he sadly and pity-

ingly turn his eyes away, accepting in death as in life the bitter creed of sacrifice : that these young British men *must* die that the Empire and all it signified could live ; that the path of folly and stupidity which sacrificed their lives wantonly, uselessly, was the inevitable thorny path of human knowledge ; that the road to human happiness and to human wisdom lies through gloomy valleys of despair and bitter salty seas of tears ?

Something before leaving this theme of the Armies of the Somme must be said on another subject. The Germans as we know were desperately short of munitions during this series of battles. They had shortages in fact in everything ; guns, aeroplanes, food and material.

Sixt von Arnim writes : “ The supply of artillery ammunition of all kinds, during the first days of the battle did not equal the great expenditure . . . the supply was never sufficient to make good the expenditure in event of a railway being blocked one or two days.” There was a shortage in machine-guns. Steel cartridge-cases, due to scarcity of brass, caused guns to jam and considerably reduced the rate of fire. This German General, fighting desperately against his country’s foes found himself “ up against ” an enemy relatively at least as superior to the Germans in 1916 as these had been to the British in 1915. Yet it must be put to the credit of the Germans that no German General deemed it necessary to take newspaper correspondents into his confidence or to indulge in sensational appeals to the public. Instead, the Germans set their teeth and fought grimly on, and held their lines to the death. During the war we had hard things to say against the Germans, but this at least they never gave us cause to say: that German Generals in the field



hounded newspapers on to attack their Commanders-in-Chief, or took much interest in political wire-pulling at home. The British controversy between "Easterners" and "Westerners" had its counterpart in Germany between those who favoured trying for a decision against Russia, and those who favoured the attempt for a decision against France. No lesser personages than Falkenhayn and Hindenburg were engaged in a controversy which waxed hotter and hotter. Yet no word of this dispute reached the Press, and neither of the protagonists strove to carry his point by inflaming public opinion, necessarily ill-informed upon such technical topics. Compare with this the attitude of the British General Staff who when anything happened to come upon the *tapis* whether at a Cabinet meeting or elsewhere, to which they objected, never hesitated to inspire articles in the Press to arouse public controversy, frequently violating all the *canons* of official secrecy in doing so. The example may be quoted moreover of Falkenhayn, who after having been Chief-of-Staff and Supreme War-Leader of the German Armies, having been replaced by Hindenburg, loyally offered to serve under the latter's orders, and did so in Roumania and in Asia Minor.

If there was much in the German military spirit that was abominable and utterly vile, there were also one or two things which were rather fine, and which the British Army could have usefully imitated.

## CHAPTER VII

### LORD KITCHENER AND HIS SUCCESSORS

**A** SURVEY of Lord Kitchener's work at the War Office would necessarily be incomplete without reference to the work done by his successors. Many of the difficulties which confronted the great War Minister were of a recurring nature and confronted his successors also—but never under quite such disadvantageous circumstances as those under which the soldier Secretary of State was called upon to face them.

Lord Kitchener upon his death was succeeded at the War Office by Mr. Lloyd George. We may in fact justly say that it was in practice Mr. Lloyd George who, first as Secretary of State for War and then as Prime Minister, truly succeeded to Lord Kitchener's rôle as Supreme War Chief of the British Armies. After the fall of Mr. Asquith's Government in 1916, the War Office passed into the hands of various figure-heads, but Mr. Lloyd George was, in reality, as much his own Secretary of State for War during the period 1916-18 as he became his own Foreign Secretary at the time of the Peace Conference and subsequently. At the various Conferences at Calais, Paris, and Versailles, we find the Prime Minister promulgating decisions of momentous importance over the heads of, and often without even the formality of consultation with, his military advisers. Much

less would he appear to have attached any great weight to the opinions of the civilian ministers who were nominally at the head of the War Office. In view of the quite inaccurate criticism of the Dardanelles Commission, that Lord Kitchener habitually neglected to consult his subordinates and gave orders over the heads of the Chiefs of Departments, this is a phase in Mr. Lloyd George's character worthy of comment.

Mr. Lloyd George in taking over the War Office found a state of affairs very different from that which had confronted Lord Kitchener. Whereas the latter had found himself called upon to conduct a great war without an army, with a War Office "bled white" of every able or experienced staff-officer, and with the country denuded of practically every officer who might be usefully employed in training new formations, Mr. Lloyd George found himself Secretary of State in a War Office which controlled huge armies in the field and a vast mechanism for raising, training and equipping drafts and new formations. In June 1916 the B.E.F. in France alone numbered 1,243,457 men, the grand total of Expeditionary Forces in various theatres of war numbered 1,873,932, the grand total for the Empire as a whole including depot troops at home, was not far short of twice that number. The munitions problem had been solved, there were no difficulties in the way of equipping troops, hutments upon an immense scale obviated the necessity of putting these in billets, moreover the entire system of training had been revised and brought into line with the necessities of war. Schools of Instruction for officers and N.C.O.'s had been formed, cadet battalions had been established upon a large scale in which men recommended by their Commanding Officers might undergo a period of intensive training after which, if suitable, they were granted commissions. The

Army Schools of Cookery, of Musketry, of Physical Training, had been reopened and tremendously expanded, the Machine-Gun Corps and Air Force had vast training establishments at home. Nor had Mr. Lloyd George anything like the recruiting difficulties which had faced Lord Kitchener. The Conscription Acts placed immense powers in his hands, and subsequently, as Prime Minister, who was, as said, virtually his own Secretary of State for War, he concentrated powers within his hands, such as no War Minister had ever possessed since the days of Cromwell; he filled a position which was in fact Napoleonic. Moreover, the new Secretary of State for War had the military party solidly at his back. He had figured as the Red-Hot Gospeller of Conscription, and the Northcliffe Press had held him up to admiration as a David, inspired from Jehovah to slay the Goliath of Prussian Militarism. He was the Wizard of the Munitions Ministry, who, according to the current version, had made his way against a deadweight of sloth and incapacity, to deliver shells to the troops. Nor had the new War Secretary ever shown himself chary of bitter and scornful criticisms directed against his predecessor. For instance:

“I asked L. G. whether it was true that Joffre had gone back on his undertaking to allow a large Army to go to the Balkans, and he said that this was correct, and that Joffre must be untrustworthy, as he, L. G., could not conceive that one of his—L. G.’s—own colleagues had deceived him. Whereat we all laughed, and I think that there is no doubt that Lord K. brought back from France last week an inaccurate impression of Joffre’s opinions. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

And again:

“He (Lloyd George) was most critical of Lord K., and

<sup>1</sup> Repington, p. 54. Needless to say, Lord Kitchener’s statement was absolutely correct.

said some very severe things about him. Evidently something has cropped up, and the story that K. had a very bad week in the Cabinet is confirmed. There must be something more than mere obstinacy, or L. G. would not have spoken as he did.”<sup>1</sup>

Considerations of loyalty or of good taste would not appear to have hindered the future Prime Minister from a policy of invidious and belittling criticisms directed against his predecessor in the Office of Secretary of State for War, a lack of judgment and an attitude of pose which lends force to rather pointed criticisms of Mr. Lloyd George attributed at the time to Mr. McKenna. “Lloyd George is out for power. What he loves is to be always in the lime-light. It was for this reason he quarrelled with Winston Churchill when the latter enjoyed popularity. . . . For the same reason he never rested until he had completely undermined Lord Kitchener’s position. Lloyd George’s object is to pose before history as the organizer of victory.”

In any case it is clear that Mr. Lloyd George as Secretary of State for War was, so to speak, “on velvet.” He succeeded to a gigantic military machine in full working order, he had the ear of the Press, he had Conscription Acts at his back. It was very much the story of the Munitions Ministry over again, save that whereas in the case of Munitions he was unquestioned master in his own house, and confronted by technical problems of comparatively simple nature, at the War Office there existed the Imperial General Staff, whilst the problems involved in the movement of troops from one theatre of war to another were of a deeply technical nature, upon which military men might reasonably question the right of a civilian to pass an *ex parte* judgment. But Mr. Lloyd George was of all men the least inclined to allow him-

<sup>1</sup> Repington, Vol. I, p. 46.

self to be treated as a mere figurehead in his own department. The fiery Welshman with his Celtic imagination and passionate flow of words was of all men the least likely to suffer himself to be relegated to the position of a mere spectator of the tragic march of events. One pictures him at this stage as absorbing almost unconsciously much of the emotionalism of war, surcharged so to speak with the electric thrill of the stupendous drama going on all around, intoxicated with the surging passion of hopes and fears, of wild exultation and of bitter disappointment, feverishly eager to be "up and doing," at times inspired almost with the vision of some Welsh seer, at other times falling to the depth of almost childish folly. We may well imagine how a spirit such as this would beat against the calmness and seeming impassivity of a Kitchener, how he would be perpetually urging for things to be done which were either unwise or were already being done as fast as they could be done. And if the differences in temperament and outlook were so great as to render a whole-hearted and harmonious co-operation between a Lloyd George and a Lord Kitchener scarcely conceivable, how much less possible was it to have harmonious co-operation between the future Prime Minister and men such as Robertson and Haig? Kitchener, with all his temperamental contrast to Lloyd George, was at least a man of essential greatness of soul and broadness of outlook. How far he could have worked as Secretary of State for War with Lloyd George as Prime Minister must always be a matter of speculation. It is just possible that the two men would have "hit it off," that the little Welshman, satisfied at having gained the summit of his ambition, would have refrained from carping and captious interference with Kitchener, and that the genius of the soldier joined to the genius of the civilian might have produced results surprising to

mankind and which would have perceptibly shortened the war. But if it is doubtful as to how far Lloyd George could have worked with Lord Kitchener, the fact is indisputable that he was of all yoke-fellows the most unsuitable for Robertson and Haig. Both were eminent soldiers; both were, unquestionably, extremely able men. But of neither can it be said quite truthfully that he was a genius. On the contrary, there was about both these soldiers, able men though they were, a certain narrowness in scope and outlook, intensifying the differences between themselves and Mr. Lloyd George. If the civilian were apt to become favourable to wild and fantastic projects, the soldiers were too apt to be irresponsive when projects were urged upon them of perfectly sound nature, save that they conflicted with pre-conceived notions of war on the Western Front. Thus, very early in the days of Mr. Lloyd George's Secretaryship of State for War, we get a sharp conflict of opinion arising between him and his military advisers, a conflict which deepened and became the more bitter as time went on, and which was never quite healed over.

To a certain extent this conflict recalls that between G.H.Q. in France in the days of Sir John French and Lord Kitchener. With the very important difference, however, that whereas Mr. Lloyd George was a civilian ignorant of the military A B C, Lord Kitchener was not merely a man of genius, but an experienced soldier familiar with all the *technique* of war. And yet, even so, no record is to be found of Lord Kitchener ever interposing his authority in so arbitrary and abrupt a fashion as Mr. Lloyd George in suddenly placing Sir Douglas Haig under orders of the French General Nivelle, without as much as going through the formality of telling him about it. Lord French has dedicated a book, in which he makes frequent and quite

unjustifiable complaint that Lord Kitchener failed to leave him the full exercise of his functions as Commander-in-Chief in France, to no less a person than Mr. Lloyd George. We may feel curious as to what Lord French would have had to say had Lord Kitchener on the eve of the battle of Loos suddenly put him under the orders of a French general, or proposed to impound his reserves to form a new "strategic" reserve to be under a French general. All these things were actually done by Mr. Lloyd George.

The points at issue between Lord Kitchener and the General Staff were points in connection with the general conduct and duration of the war, points upon which Lord Kitchener has since, quite definitely, been shown to have been right, and the General Staff since, quite definitely, shown to have been wrong. The points at issue between Mr. Lloyd George and the General Staff were no lesser problems than the distribution of reserves in France and the conduct of campaigns, problems upon which the Prime Minister as a civilian had certainly no claim to pass an authoritative judgment. Yet when one thinks of all the tittle-tattle which the General Staff had put into circulation concerning Lord Kitchener, the press attacks instigated against him not only by French but by other officers on his staff, there does not seem to be absent a certain element of poetic justice in the treatment which they got from Mr. Lloyd George when *he* came into power. If Lord Kitchener had flogged with whips, Mr. Lloyd George flogged with scorpions. This is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the crisis on manpower with which we shall deal more in detail later. For the present it will suffice to say that nothing gained Mr. Lloyd George Tory support, more than his attitude to conscription. Fine old crusted Tories such as Colonel Repington bowed down before the new Apostle, and were fervent



in their wish for Mr. Lloyd George as Prime Minister. But alas ! the wily Welshman once Prime Minister, we discern a lamentable falling away from grace. The Conscription Acts were very laxly enforced, and the 70 divisions taken by Lord Kitchener as the basis of our 1916 programme dwindled away after his death to the equivalent of 50 ! A scathing commentary upon those who had put in Mr. Lloyd George as an alleged Hot-Gospeller of War ! No people had raised louder voices against Lord Kitchener's " feebleness " upon the question of compulsory service than men of the type of Repington and the extreme wing of the Conservative Party, no people had been more virulent in their abuse of Mr. Asquith. Yet whereas Lord Kitchener with Mr. Asquith's support raised the army within less than two years to a strength of 70 divisions, Mr. Lloyd George within an equal period suffered the strength of the army in the field to decline by nearly one-third !

Mr. Lloyd George's Secretaryship of State for War coincided with the Somme offensive, the offensive from Salonica, which ended with capture of Monastir, the ill-starred Roumanian offensive, the operations for the defence of the Suez Canal, which ultimately developed into the Palestine Offensive, and the operations in Mesopotamia which ultimately ended in the fall of Baghdad.

The general position of the Allies in Autumn, 1916, was extraordinarily favourable. The Brussilov offensive on the Eastern Front had inflicted serious losses upon the Austro-Hungarian armies, and obliged the Germans to call away troops urgently needed upon the Western Front, to redress the balance. The Italians were holding their own. On the Western Front the Verdun offensive of the Germans had fizzled out, and the Somme offensive of the British armies, if unaccompanied by any immediate striking tactical suc-

cesses, unquestionably formed a drain upon the German *moral* and resources, which filled the German General Staff with anxiety. Upon the Eastern Front, moreover, a new factor was about to enter into play, a factor of immense importance, and capable, if utilized to the full, conceivably of bringing decisive victory to the Allied Arms; Roumania was about to enter into the war. In Salonica, a large Allied army was favourably situated to co-operate with the Roumanians from the south, whilst the Russian armies under the direction of Brussilov could have made a convergent movement from the north. There were here all the elements necessary for a big combined movement in which all three Allies could take part, and which threatened the enemy in his weakest spot. The Austro-German lines in Transylvania were very weakly held whilst the frontier was of a type peculiarly unfavourable for defensive warfare. There existed no long, deeply entrenched lines, such as upon the Western Front taxed the utmost resources of the Allies: moreover, from the nature of the country, no such lines as the Hindenburg line, built subsequently in the West, *could possibly have been erected*. The line to be held from the Russians in the North, to the Allies in the South, from Czernowitz to Salonica, was too enormously long for any system of permanent fortification; even the Roumanian frontier alone was too long for any system of defensive works. It was thus a theatre of war which despite the handicaps of bad roads and poor communications ruled out any system of trench-warfare upon the scale practised in France and Flanders, or even upon the Russian Front; which lent itself to a policy of marches and surprises, which favoured generalship and cunning. At the time when Roumania entered the war, little more than a line of outposts confronted her armies, whilst the Allies in Salonica,

had mainly Bulgarians in front of them, troops of whom Hindenburg has placed upon record, that whilst brave in hand-to-hand fighting and against rifles and machine-guns, they were peculiarly sensitive to artillery fire. Those primitive peoples, the German Field-marshal informs us, lack the *moral* courage necessary to stand up against high-explosive shell. Two or three British divisions from the Somme front, backed with their powerful artillery, could have broken through the Bulgarian front in Salonica in 1916, in the same fashion, and with even greater ease, than was done two years later, and the results might well have been decisive of the war. Sofia would have been in the hands of the Allies long before Bucharest fell to the Germans, the Roumanians, battling against German troops taken from the Somme front whilst Sir Douglas Haig's "Wearing-Out" battle was actually in progress, would have received help and reinforcement, the German advance would have been stayed, Bucharest would have been saved, a corridor would have been opened up between Russia and her Western Allies which would very conceivably have averted her collapse in 1917. Unhappily any attempt to take broad views of the military situation as a whole shattered upon the narrowness and provincialism—no other term expresses it—of the General Staffs in England and in France. The Salonica force had always been the Cinderella of the Allied Armies. Newspaper experts of the type of Repington had railed against it in season and out. Every man and gun sent to the East was sent grudgingly. Distinguished soldiers were saturated with the view that the war could only be won on the West Front. The best thing to do with troops in Salonica was to pack them into transports and to send them off to join Haig hammering away on the Somme. That such a procedure would have meant that Greece would have

thrown in her lot decisively with that of Germany and her Allies, that twelve Bulgarian divisions set free by such a movement, divisions each equal in numerical strength to two of those of the Allies,<sup>1</sup> would certainly not have been left by the German General Staff to eat their heads off in idleness at home, but would have been sent either to fight against the Russians or to bolster up the Turks, would seem to have been left out of such estimates of the general military situation. In any case, however, any suggestion to increase the strength of the Salonica Force aroused tempests of opposition. Mr. Lloyd George must be conceded the credit of having looked into the situation with clearer vision than his military advisers. On September 7th, 1916, we hear that he thought the Somme offensive wrong and that troops should have been sent to Salonica. Shortly afterwards a *communiqué* appeared in *The Times* pointing out that "Operations appertained to the General Staff" and hinting that the Secretary of State for War had no right to pass military decisions without consultation with his military advisers. On October 9th the differences between the Secretary of State for War and his military advisers came to a head. Mr. Lloyd George urged that eight Allied divisions should be sent to Salonica. Sir William Robertson opposed the project point-blank. There ensued a most extraordinary episode. Robertson on the point of tendering his resignation, as usual consulted Colonel Repington who straightway rushed to see Lord Northcliffe. The latter intervened, brought pressure to bear upon the Government, and the General Staff carried their point. The whole episode is instructive. Whilst Robertson was tittle-tattling with Repington, and Lord Northcliffe was acting as *deus ex*

<sup>1</sup> A Bulgarian division had 24 battalions whereas a British or French division had twelve.

*machina*, Hindenburg was drawing division after division from the Western Front to hurl upon the Roumanians. Whilst Lloyd George vainly urged that eight Allied divisions should be sent from West to East, Hindenburg actually took ten. It is surely the best commentary upon Haig's "Wearing-Out" battles that they never succeeded in preventing the German Higher Command from drawing troops to be used for other strategic objectives. In 1916, in the midst of the Somme fighting, they took troops to crush Roumania; in 1917, in the midst of the Flanders offensive, they took troops to inflict a humiliating disaster upon the Italians. Certainly in the Autumn of 1916, had the Germans displayed anything like the blind "Westernism" of the British General Staff, the results must have been disastrous to Germany. The Roumanians would have swarmed through the gap in their lines, Budapest and Vienna would have been endangered.

Looking at the matter in the light of after knowledge the only real criticism to be made against Mr. Lloyd George's proposal is that it came somewhat late in the day. The eight divisions should have been sent to Sarrail two months earlier so as to have been ready for an offensive upon a big scale simultaneously with the entry of Roumania into the war. It seems amazing that no serious effort should have been made to enter into close military touch with Roumania and to have exercised a guiding hand upon her strategy. The Roumanians made no effective dispositions to cover themselves from an attack from Bulgaria, apparently indulging in the curious illusion that the latter country, Roumania not having declared war upon her, would refrain from realizing that her own interests were bound up with those of her Allies; or else relying upon an offensive by Sarrail to pin the Bulgarians down. The Roumanian armies

swept wildly over the Transylvanian Alps with little thought for their rear. The extraordinary blundering on the part of the French and British General Staffs is rendered the more apparent when one glances at the map and recognizes that Roumania had the power of repeating her march into Bulgaria, at the time of the second Balkan War of 1913, in which case she would have attacked the German-Bulgarian army from the rear simultaneously with the offensive of Sarrail's army from Salonica. The French and British General Staffs not merely failed to reinforce Sarrail sufficiently to enable him to carry out a really vigorous offensive, independently, but would not appear to have made the least attempt to influence Roumania in the way of co-ordinating the march of her armies with those of her Allies.

We cannot resist a somewhat hateful suspicion that the failure to make the best use of the Salonica army possible, on this occasion, was largely due to the ill-feeling between Joffre and Sarrail. It may well be doubted if the French General Staff had any real desire that Sarrail should gain a brilliant victory. He had been sent to the East to get rid of him. Joffre and his entourage feared his influence in France. But a really brilliant victory of the Salonica Army under Sarrail, coming at a time of general barrenness of achievement in the West, would have increased Sarrail's influence tenfold. He might very conceivably have been made *Generalissimo*, a prospect which Joffre feared. Certainly we find Joffre during all this time preserving a very doubtful attitude towards the Salonica Expedition. Whilst publicly he supported it, in private he was constantly belittling it and intriguing against it with the British General Staff. He went so far as to openly admit to British Generals that the whole thing was meant to keep Sarrail out of the way. The

British General Staff, always prone to look through French spectacles, readily listened to suggestions of this nature, and thus at a time when this expedition could undoubtedly have been made to play a rôle of immense strategic importance, we find an attitude of almost wilful blindness prevailing among the shining lights of the General Staffs in London and Paris.

Mr. Lloyd George's proposal to send eight divisions, if it came too late to achieve the full results which such a reinforcement of the Salonica force could have achieved if made in August, would certainly have been in time to avert the fall of Bucharest. Four divisions if taken from Haig's army would not have made any great difference to the Somme offensive. The British had in any case a very great superiority there, and the "wearing-out" tactics in any case held no prospect of an early decision. As said, troops who had been trained in the ordeal of the Somme would have gone through the Bulgarian lines like a knife cutting cheese. The Germans would have been obliged to send troops to bolster them up, and if it was to be a case of "killing Germans," then "killing Germans" could have been carried out quite as usefully under conditions dictated by *us*, and upon ground chosen by *us*, as by killing them upon their own chosen ground and under conditions dictated by *them*.

The terrible and irremediable loss which the British Army and the British Empire sustained in the death of Lord Kitchener, and the folly and absurdity of most of the criticisms made against him become never more apparent than when we consider the ghastly muddle made by his successors of the Roumanian campaign. No campaign ever opened more bright with promise, no campaign ever opened which afforded to the Allied armies so dazzling and fair a prospect of a series of sweeping victories which might conceivably have

terminated the war by the Christmas of 1916. No campaign ever terminated in a more humiliating or disgraceful disaster. Mr. Lloyd George saw with just vision but he lacked the authority to impose his will upon the recalcitrant generals. Lord Kitchener would have been in quite a different position. He was a soldier whose word up to the day of his death was accepted by the country as the supreme arbitration upon all that appertained to his sphere. And that Lord Kitchener, who scoffed at the theory of winning war by meticulous adherence to copy-book maxims, would have failed to envision all the immense possibilities opening out before a vigorous and determined offensive from Salonica in combination with the Roumanian armies, surely no one would be so foolish as to suggest. Lord Kitchener was himself an "Easterner" not in the sense that he disregarded the supreme importance of the Western Front, but in that he recognized that this did not rule out the possibility of successes in other theatres of operations, which might be made to harmonize with the general plan of campaign. He was always strongly preoccupied with the defence of Egypt, and viewed with disfavour a purely defensive attitude there. Sir Charles Callwell relates that when he, in co-operation with Sir Archibald Murray, drew up a scheme for the defence of Egypt, based upon a purely defensive attitude along the Suez Canal, "He (Lord Kitchener) sent for me, expressed himself as strongly opposed to our view . . . he wished to keep the enemy as far away from Egypt as possible for fear of internal disturbances." Lord Kitchener realized what the British Public at the time was far from realizing; that the Egyptian people were heart and soul with the Turks our enemies, and that a British force defending the Suez Canal had every prospect of suddenly finding itself menaced by risings in the rear organized by Turks and Germans



smuggled into the country by enemy submarines.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be doubted that the scheme of an offensive from Salonica upon a great scale, which would incidentally have menaced Constantinople and drawn away Turkish troops from Egypt would have been a blow after Lord Kitchener's own heart, and that he would have used every effort to have persuaded the Roumanians to join in the scheme in the sense of attacking the Bulgarian army from the rear simultaneously with the offensive of our own armies. He would have convinced them that their own projects in Transylvania could be most usefully achieved once Bulgaria had been ground between the two great Allied Armies, and these had joined hands. We should have witnessed a grand combined scheme of operations instead of disconnected half-hearted movements which invited the disaster which ensued. It must be remembered in this connection that Lord Kitchener was the only British soldier or statesman whose word carried much weight with the Allies. Despite the atmosphere of mutual tittle-tattle which prevailed between the French and British General Staffs, Kitchener's dominating influence in most of the military conferences between the two great Western Allies has never been questioned. He was very often successful in talking Joffre round, a feat which few men could boast of. Certainly neither the French Government nor French soldiers ever quite forgot the share which Kitchener had taken in removing the "misunderstanding" before the Battle of the Marne. In Russia, Kitchener's influence was extraordinary. Sir Charles Callwell may again be quoted: "Striking testimony to the confidence which his (Kitchener's) name inspired amongst our Allies

<sup>1</sup> Arnould de la Perriere, the most able as well as the most chivalrous of German U-boat commanders, was at the time maintaining a regular postal and transport service between Constantinople and Egypt.

is afforded by the action of the Russians in the Summer of 1915, in entrusting the question of their being furnished with munitions from the United States into his hands. They came to him as a child comes to its mother. This, be it noted, was at a time when our own army fighting in many fields was notoriously none too well fitted out with weapons nor with ammunition for them, at a time when the most powerful group of newspapers in this country had recently been making a pointed attack upon him in connection with this very matter, at a time when an idea undoubtedly existed in many quarters of the United Kingdom that the provision of war material had been neglected and botched under his control. That there was no justification whatever for that idea does not alter the fact that the idea prevailed."

The small States commonly accepted Lord Kitchener's word as law. We are told that "Foreign officers coming on official errands to London attached an enormous importance to obtaining an interview with him." He displayed infinite skill and tact in dealing with them. "*Comme il est charmant, M. le maréchal,*" the gratified foreign officer would say after someone had grabbed him somehow, and conducted him out of the presence; "*je n'oublierai de ma vie que je lui ai serré la main.*" And he would go back to where he had come from, as pleased as Punch, having completely failed in his embassy.

We get another picture of Lord Kitchener when foreign officers failed to prove amenable to his will.

"The Attaché protested eagerly, volubly, stubbornly, pathetically, but all to no purpose. Then at last we rose to our feet, Lord K., finding his visitor wholly unconvinced, drew himself up to his full height. He seemed to tower over the Attaché, who was himself a tall man, and—well, it is hard to set down in words the happenings of a tense situation.

The scene is one I shall never forget, as, by his demeanour, rather than by any words of his, Lord K. virtually issued a command that no Serb soldier was to cross the Bulgar border." <sup>1</sup>

Certainly it can be asserted without fear of contradiction that there was no Englishman whose voice in 1916 would have carried the same weight and authority with the Roumanian General Staff as that of Lord Kitchener, certainly there was no other Englishman, soldier or civilian, whose voice would have carried equal weight with France or Russia.

Mr. Lloyd George was possessed of genius divorced from military knowledge. Sir William Robertson had military knowledge divorced from genius, neither Mr. Lloyd George nor Sir William Robertson were, at the time, men of great international renown possessed of weight and authority with our Allies. Lord Kitchener's position in this respect was absolutely unique. No British soldier up to the very end of the war came anywhere near to replacing him.

It may be said, Lord Kitchener made a muddle of things with the Expedition to Antwerp, he made a muddle of the Expedition to the Dardanelles. Why should we assume that he would have been successful with the campaign in Roumania? In the Antwerp Expedition, however, Kitchener was called in at the last moment to face a totally unexpected situation due to the enemy's surprise use of new tactics. The prompt and masterly dispositions made for the relief of the beleaguered city were set at naught by the surprising rapid development of the attack by giant howitzers. A fortress which, under normal circumstances, should have held out for many weeks, fell within a few days. And even so, Lord Kitchener's dispositions for the relief, played

<sup>1</sup> *Experiences of a Dug-Out*, p. 77.

a decisive share in the victory of the British Army at the First Battle of Ypres, which has never been awarded any public acknowledgment. In the Dardanelles Expedition he was called upon to achieve success after the Navy had tried and failed, i.e. after the enemy had received full warning and was flushed by initial success. And even so he came within an ace of achieving a decisive success. At the Battle of Suvla Bay, the sloth and incapacity of a subordinate commander alone stood between the British Army and victory. It was the failure of British diplomacy, and the entry of Bulgaria into the war, which finally led to the Dardanelles Expedition being broken off. Moreover, in 1914 and in 1915, Lord Kitchener worked under the handicap of inconceivable disadvantages. The Army was undergoing the birth-throes of expansion. The Imperial General Staff, in nerveless and incapable hands, had ceased to function as regards the larger issues of the war, thus throwing an immense burden upon Lord Kitchener's already overburdened shoulders. There were shortages in troops, in stores, in munitions, in everything. The whole vast mechanism of raising, equipping and training troops had to be brought into being. And all in the very midst of conducting military operations of increasing magnitude! In 1915, to use a phrase attributed to Sir Ian Hamilton, it was as hard to get troops from Kitchener as butter from a dog's mouth. The reason was that there were too few troops to go round. Demands for troops and stores to be sent to the Dardanelles had to be balanced against equally imperative claims from other fronts. In 1916 the position in this respect had wholly changed. There was in this year never a time when the British Commander-in-Chief on the Western Front could honestly say that he was desperately short of men and in fear of an enemy offensive. An attempt to take say four divi-

sions from Haig's command would no doubt have been regarded by the latter with extreme disfavour. But he could not seriously have maintained that such procedure would have exposed the Allies on the Western Front to the danger of an enemy break-through. Lord Kitchener himself was moreover, in the time immediately preceding his death, in a position of far greater freedom than at any other time during the war. The mechanism of raising, equipping, training and maintaining troops, was now in good working order, whilst in Robertson he possessed a Chief-of-Staff, who, if lacking in the surpeme gift of genius, was, within his sphere, an exceedingly able and efficient soldier. Thus the Secretary of State for War was free to concentrate upon the broader issues, and to leave matters of routine in other hands.

There was nothing unexpected about the Roumanian campaign. Had the Allied General Staffs troubled to do so, there would have been ample time to draw up plans of operations and to accumulate troops and stores. What standpoint Kitchener would have taken may be gleaned from a remark made by him in May 1916 when discussing the project of an offensive from Salonica which would not, it was said, require reinforcements. Lord Kitchener said that it was hopeless to think of an offensive from Salonica unless very large reinforcements were sent to Sarrail, and that if such an offensive were launched it would be necessary to "see it through" otherwise defeat would be inevitable. From this it becomes clear that Lord Kitchener would not have favoured the half-hearted procedure actually adopted. Sarrail, ordered to make an offensive without being afforded the means to do so, made some slight progress and took Monastir. But four Bulgarian divisions <sup>1</sup> slipped away from

<sup>1</sup> Equal to eight Allied divisions.

his front, and intervened against the Roumanians with disastrous effect. It is clear that Lord Kitchener had he been alive would have insisted that reinforcements should be sent to Sarrail and that he would have taken troops from France to do so. In August 1916 this would have been a measure without danger. How far Robertson would have opposed such a scheme is doubtful. Coming from Mr. Lloyd George, a civilian, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, resented the project as trespassing upon his own preserves, and entrenched himself in an armour of Westernism. But coming from Lord Kitchener it is possible enough that the C.I.G.S. would have supported it. If the two men occasionally differed there was genuine respect and affection between them.

It is conceivable enough that Lord Kitchener would have brought Robertson round to his own way of thinking. It is illuminating in this connection that we find the C.I.G.S., who had at first favoured a policy of passive defence in Egypt, ultimately coming round to Kitchener's views of an offensive defence in this region. But that, willy-nilly, Lord Kitchener would have been successful, in giving to the Roumanian campaign the stamp of his own masterful genius, can scarcely be doubted.

The failure of the Roumanian campaign did much more than inflict a most humiliating and disgraceful disaster upon the Allied arms. It led to a breach between Mr. Lloyd George and his military advisers which grew more and more bitter as time went on. When the disaster happened which he had foreseen and against which he had warned the Generals in vain, the heart of the great civilian became filled with bitterness. The soldiers had shown a great deal of pettiness about another matter. Complaints having been received from the Army in France with regard to supplies, Mr. Lloyd George proposed to put in Sir Eric Geddes as

Quartermaster-General. The proposal roused a storm of opposition. It was prophesied that black disaster would befall the Army if its supplies were put in the hands of a civilian. As usual we find the soldiers running to Lord Northcliffe about it. That the problem involved was essentially a matter of railways and the movement of goods behind the front from one fixed point to another, and that Geddes as a railway-man had had more experience in such matters than all the soldiers rolled into one, was nothing in comparison with the fact that it was proposed to oust a soldier by a civilian. Mr. Lloyd George retorted that he could not recognize any difference between soldiers and civilians, and was going to take the best man he found wherever he discovered him. He carried his point, but the episode did not reflect any credit upon the narrow military clique who, whilst not displaying any great ability, or any particular capacity for self-sacrifice where their own particular interests were concerned, yet put forward a dogmatic claim to be allowed to "run" a war upon which depended the future of the whole British Empire, and the lives and happiness of millions of their fellow-countrymen, free from interference by a "pack of politicians."

There can be no doubt that it was the pliability which Mr. Asquith had shown in the hands of Lord Northcliffe on this occasion which finally decided Mr. Lloyd George upon the dangerous policy of displacing his political chief. It was Mr. Asquith's interposition which had placed an embargo upon the proposal of the Secretary of State for War that troops should be taken from the West Front and sent to Salonica. It was an interposition which brought about the disaster which Mr. Lloyd George had feared and foreseen, and which he never forgot nor forgave. It was an interposition for which the then Prime Minister received no

thanks from the military party, never prone to admit their mistakes. On the contrary there was a general tendency to hold him as a scapegoat. It was a tendency which Mr. Lloyd George exploited with great skill. There can surely be conceived no situation more full of irony at the time of a great war than Lord Northcliffe, who had done so much to oppose the only policy which could conceivably have brought success to the Allied arms, joining with Mr. Lloyd George, the man who had proposed this policy, to attack Mr. Asquith, for doing the very thing Lord Northcliffe had wanted him to do. But consistency was never a strong point in Lord Northcliffe's character. Mr. Lloyd George about this time is reported to have described him as a sort of flea hopping about from one side to the other, so that nobody knew where to catch him. If a brilliant journalist he seems to have been much a creature of whims and fancies, caught by sudden enthusiasms for persons and policies which changed to as violent and irrational hatreds and prejudices. He was to nothing and to no one constant long. Sir Philip Gibbs, who worked under him, and who knew him well, describes him as an "inspiration in the triviality of thought, in the lighter side of the Puppet Show. Never once did I hear Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe) utter one serious commentary upon life, or any word approaching nobility of thought, or any hint of some deep purpose behind this engine which he was driving with such splendid zest in its power and efficiency. . . . He had his court favourites, like the mediæval kings, generally one of the newcomers who had aroused his enthusiasm by some little 'scoop,' or a brilliant bit of work. But he tired of them quickly, and it was a dangerous thing to occupy that position, because it was almost certain to mean a speedy fall." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Adventures in Journalism*, p. 85.



Much of Lord Northcliffe's success as a journalist may no doubt be attributed to the fact that the Public is itself full of whims and fancies, absorbed in the trivialities of life. But that in time of a war in which the whole future of the British Empire was at stake, this mind full of triviality, lacking in any cool reasoned balance, filled with unreasoning enthusiasms and at times childish hatred and spite, should have been in a position to powerfully influence public opinion and to exercise a pressure before which Prime Ministers bowed down, was little short of a national disaster. Looking at the matter dispassionately it is difficult to conceive of any really useful function served by the Northcliffe Press. Its revelations about the shell-shortage were unnecessary and did more harm than good ; its clamour about conscription reduced this from a national to a party measure and considerably delayed its introduction ; its agitation for a "ruthless" blockade and its jeers at President Wilson did much to endanger, about this time, our relations with the United States ; and its unfair and venomous onslaughts against men of the type of Asquith, Winston Churchill, Lord Haldane, etc., resulted for a time in very able men being practically driven from public life. There was practically no public man who did not become sooner or later the target of a flood of venomous abuse, and the fact that the same papers had united only a short time before, in covering them with lavish praise, made little difference. Lord Kitchener welcomed into the War Office with every token of enthusiasm, found himself within a short time overwhelmed by scurrilous abuse. But in this he fared no worse than Mr. Lloyd George, the Geddes brothers, and practically every man who enjoyed office and power. Colonel Repington himself, as we shall see, fell from grace and was cast into the wilderness. There was no trace of consistency or settled policy about the North-

cliffe Press. It would swallow its own words, advocate a policy which it had previously condemned, or *vice versa* with most bewildering rapidity.

Mr. Lloyd George, in the manœuvres which made him Prime Minister, showed considerable skill in managing Lord Northcliffe. He ultimately found a way to muzzle the Northcliffe Press first by inducing its Chief to undertake a sinecure mission abroad, and then by taking him into the Cabinet in a position in which he could work little mischief, but which, under the theory of "joint responsibility," involved him in the decisions taken. But it was impossible to work for long with so volatile and inconstant a nature. Lord Northcliffe left the Cabinet, and there developed a feud between the Government and the Northcliffe Press, which endured until Mr. Lloyd George's fall from power, in 1922.

Mr. Lloyd George as Prime Minister introduced in 1917 no great change in public policy. Although the avowed object of the overthrow of the Asquith Ministry was "to speed up" the conduct of the war, the War Cabinet introduced by Mr. Lloyd George would not appear to have functioned very successfully. Robertson complained that they sat twice a day and occupied their whole time with military plans which were *his* job. They took his time but did not take his advice. Lord Jellicoe at the Admiralty was obliged to tell them that he could not attend their deliberations and simultaneously conduct the war at sea. The new Prime Minister spoke bravely to the House of Commons when he said: "You cannot conduct war with a Sanhedrin." But the War Cabinet would not, in practice, appear to have shown any great courage or capacity in the conduct of affairs. A Bill for National Service proposed by the Asquith Cabinet was dropped by the succeeding Government.

Friction between the Government and the General Staff

developed apace. The muddle about Roumania had not, unhappily, given any evidence of great military wisdom on the part of the men entrusted with the control of our military operations. The tendency of the Prime Minister to intervene in purely military issues became more pronounced than before. He is reported to have once burst out that we were all asked to keep silent and bow the knee to the Military Moloch, but that he was responsible, and as he would have to take the blame, he meant to have his own way.<sup>1</sup> He was profoundly dissatisfied with the Somme offensive which indeed would appear to have been conceived as a very much more ambitious project than has been admitted by the authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*.<sup>2</sup> There can be little doubt that it was only a feeling of reluctance to inaugurate his Premiership by sudden and sweeping changes in the high military commands, coupled with a certain lack of familiarity with the military *coteries*, which prevented the Prime Minister from replacing both Robertson and Haig. There ensued an unfortunate interregnum of mutual distrust and suspicion. The Prime Minister when asked to tauten up the Conscription Acts to supply more men for the army, retorted that there had been an excessive wastage of men on the Somme, that Haig had incurred casualties

<sup>1</sup> Repington, Vol. I, p. 375.

<sup>2</sup> Repington tells us that orders were given on July 1st for infantry to occupy Courcellette which actually fell, September 25th. Cavalry were ordered to reach the front Peronne-Bapaume-Isles, the same night, July 1st. During the fighting cavalry were three times brought up to break through. On one occasion five cavalry divisions were massed in depth for this operation. Sixt von Arnim, in the order so often quoted, writes with cold contempt of cavalry charges attempted against unbroken infantry as illustrating the mentality of the British Higher Command. The authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command* indulge in a great many sneers at the French General Nivelle with his gigantic schemes and "meticulous time-table" but they carefully gloss over the facts given above, which indicate that Haig indulged in schemes just as grandiose, and a time-table just as fantastic as Nivelle's.

more than twice as high as those of the French and that he was "not prepared to accept the position of a butcher's boy driving cattle to the slaughter, and that he would not do it."

As always the wrangle between "Easterners" and "Westerners" did much to complicate a military situation which in 1917 started badly and ended worse. A proposal to reinforce the army in Salonica found Robertson confiding in Colonel Repington who inspired a leading article in *The Daily Mail* against it. The discussion became international. A few days later the French paper *Temps* quoted Colonel Repington's views, and urged a policy of Westernism. That it was a breach of official confidence for Robertson to give information as to military projects laid before him in his official capacity, to Colonel Repington, and that the Allied cause could scarcely be served by a public discussion as to military plans carried out under the watchful eyes of the enemy, appears to have dawned upon no one. Later on we find Lord Northcliffe once more taken into counsel and a strong article in *The Daily Mail*.

The irony of the situation is that when subsequently some influential papers began to publish veiled attacks upon Robertson and Haig we find Colonel Repington in high indignation at such "inspired" articles. He never seems to have realized that it was he, and the soldiers, who had started this particular sort of thing.

That these Press attacks did not make for harmonious working between the Prime Minister and the soldiers may be gleaned from an episode related by Repington which may surely rank as the most remarkable story ever told as dealing with the Prime Minister of a great Empire at war, and the principal military commander in the field. Mr. Lloyd George visited Haig and practically accused him of inciting journalists to attack the Government. This accusation

Haig vehemently repudiated. The Prime Minister threatened a counter-offensive and asked Haig what he would say if he, Lloyd George, described Haig's offensive as useless slaughter when he spoke at the Guildhall, and if he said that the men had been smothered in mud and blood. Haig replied that such a speech would be highly unpatriotic.

The real villain of the piece would appear to be Colonel Repington, and not Haig. But we may compare the incident with the story of Lord Kitchener, attacked in a most cruel and cowardly fashion in the Press, and writing to French that he had heard of the articles but had not read them, but was informed that they had been inspired by French's staff. He (Kitchener) was out to beat the Germans, not Sir John French, and did not desire to make the Field-marshal suffer for the intemperance of his friends.

Early in 1917 there occurred the episode of Nivelle, mention of which has already been made. The Somme offensive had aroused no more enthusiasm in high French official circles than in British. The French General Nivelle who had gained some brilliant minor successes around Verdun, was placed in command of the French Armies, and produced a scheme for a great offensive which would, it was hoped, result in a break-through. Nivelle's appointment was received with disfavour by the French General Staff, and it is doubtful how far he received loyal and whole-hearted support. Certainly some indiscretion must have occurred, for the Germans would seem to have known all about the projected movements. The British War Cabinet, however, gave the scheme their support and placed Haig under Nivelle's command. The British General, as may be imagined, accepted these orders with a very ill-grace, and the authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command* regard the episode as discreditable to Mr. Lloyd George. But the most that can

be said is that the British Prime Minister displayed a certain lack of tact in his dealings with Haig. There would not seem in practice, once you accept the principle of unity of command, any great difference between appointing Nivelle and appointing Foch. Nivelle had the confidence of the French Government, and he proposed a scheme of operations which required British support. The chances of success in this scheme were certainly greater with a single General in supreme command. The difference in Haig's attitude is probably to be found in that in 1918 "unity of command" was accepted as an imperative necessity in face of a series of terrible disasters, and that in 1917, military men felt themselves in possession of great superiority over the enemy, and the British Commander-in-Chief at all events, saw no necessity for a measure which nothing short of danger of an overwhelming disaster could have induced British Army men to feel truly desirable.

The outbreak of the Russian Revolution in March 1917 and the retirement of the German armies to the Hindenburg line profoundly affected the military situation. The plans for a general simultaneous combined offensive upon all fronts were shattered by the disorganization which set in in the Russian Army, whilst the skilful withdrawal of the German armies to the Hindenburg line led to Nivelle's planned offensive being much in the nature of a "blow in the air." The German retiring movement was unquestionably "speeded up" by the British victory at Miraumont, but this cannot be said to have had anything in the nature of a decisive influence. The German retreat had been decided upon long beforehand. Hindenburg and Ludendorff as we now know had taken gloomy views as to German military prospects in 1917. Germany was near the end of her military tether. The country was at the end of her resources

alike in men and material. The Russian Army had been fitted out with guns and munitions by the Allies, and was in greatly superior strength to any German and Austrian forces that could be concentrated in the East. In the West, the Anglo-French armies were also much superior to the German forces which could be brought against them. Hindenburg considered the situation so desperate that he finally sanctioned the sharpened submarine-boat warfare against the Allied commerce, even at the cost of bringing America into the war. It was a counsel of despair which ultimately proved disastrous to Germany. Not even the Russian Revolution brought immediate relief to the Teutonic Powers. The situation in the East remained for long too obscure for very great bodies of troops to be withdrawn to the West Front. Ludendorff writes of Haig's victory at Arras in April 1917, that if it had happened simultaneously with the Russian successes of July in the same year, or that if it had been followed up more vigorously by the Allied High Commands in the West, the position of the Germans would have been disastrous. But the Russian armies were in the first throes of the subsequent demoralization, and the French armies were showing disquieting symptoms. Nivelle's offensive after 116,000 casualties had been incurred was pronounced to be a failure, revolutionary propaganda became busy in the French ranks, regiments ordered into the firing-line broke into mutiny. These mutinies were sternly repressed, but the Army remained shaky and generals feared to indulge upon an offensive on a big scale. In view of the charges so often brought against the British Government that it failed to give adequate support to Generals in the field, it is worth while to draw attention to the fact that Nivelle became known as "the Butcher" and his offensive was called off when the French armies involved had

sustained 116,000 casualties. Haig incurred 460,000 casualties on the Somme in 1916 without having his offensive called off, or being relieved of his command. His Flanders offensive of 1917 cost well over 350,000 casualties without gaining results appreciably greater than Nivelle's.<sup>1</sup> The Germans with all their alleged ruthlessness had no more taste for big casualty lists unaccompanied by any apparent compensating results than the French. Their Verdun offensive, whilst infinitely less costly to the German armies than the Somme offensive to the British, was regarded as unsatisfactory, and Von Falkenhayn, who was responsible for it, was relieved of his command. The authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command* make an illuminating comment on the German offensive at Verdun in 1916.

“Verdun had come within reasonable distance of knocking-out France for good. Though it failed in that by a sufficiently narrow margin the battle had certain very definite results. In the first place it marked the culminating point in the fighting spirit of the French army. Too many heroes fell in the defence of Verdun for a like quality of heroism to be possible thereafter among the general average of French divisions. . . . The fighting *capacity* of the French armies remained high and even improved . . . the fighting *spirit* of the French troops declined, and the decline showed itself on many occasions and in many ways.”<sup>2</sup>

There is here everything said in favour of the German Verdun offensive which can reasonably be said about Haig's offensives on the Somme and in Flanders. Yet the German

<sup>1</sup> “The German army had been dealt heavy blows and lost an unprecedented number of prisoners and guns. It was not really a bad start.” *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, Vol. I, p. 334, dealing with Nivelle.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I, pp. 85-86.



Government, which up to the bitter end waged war with a ruthlessness unparalleled within modern times, found the price too high for successes which left the enemy with fighting *capacity* which remained high and even improved. Von Falkenhayn was replaced by Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who succeeded in gaining very great results whilst carefully avoiding this type of warfare.

French and Germans alike showed no hesitation in changing their Generals. Joffre gave place to Nivelle, and Nivelle to Petain. Von Moltke gave place to Von Falkenhayn, and Von Falkenhayn to Von Hindenburg. Haig replacing French retained his command until the end of the war. The British Government certainly showed a patience in face of enormous casualty lists unaccompanied by great results, and a loyalty to their Generals even in face of great disasters, far in excess of that displayed by either French or Germans, an attitude which did not always meet with reciprocal loyalty from the British Generals themselves.

The collapse of the Russian armies in July 1917 and the fall of Riga soon after, rendered it apparent that the Germans would be in a position to withdraw an increasing number of troops from East to West, whilst as far back as June in the same year, it became obvious that the French army was not in a position to "mount" offensive operations upon a large scale. Under these circumstances it is difficult to see how it could be hoped that the British Army practically alone could engage in great strategic operations with any prospect of success, and it is certain that the success of any such operations would be dependent upon the force and rapidity of the blows struck, so as to surprise the enemy and to overwhelm him before he had time to concentrate his forces at the threatened point. Whilst a swift offensive with limited objectives in the Flanders region might be justified upon

grounds of improving our position around Ypres which was overlooked by the enemy, it is difficult to find any rhyme or reason for the long drawn-out and bloody drama of the offensive which actually ensued. It has been asserted that Haig was urged to make an offensive by the French. But evidence can be brought forward that the initiative in this respect lay wholly with the British Commander-in-Chief. It has been asserted, without evidence being brought forward, that the Admiralty wished Haig to clear the Flanders coast from German submarine bases. But by Autumn of 1917 when the Flanders offensive began, the introduction of the convoy-system and other defensive measures, had taken much of the sting out of the German Submarine War, and even if this had not been the case, it is hard to see what great results the capture of Zeebrugge and Ostende could have brought, from the Naval point of view. The true German submarine bases were not in Flanders but in Germany. So long as the German High Seas Fleet existed as a "fleet in being" barring the ingress to the Baltic, and the German coasts, to our own fleet; so long as German submarines could slip away from Wilhelmshafen, Bremen, Cuxhafen, and other German ports; the loss or gain of the Flanders coast-line was, from the Naval standpoint, an altogether subsidiary operation. If considered desirable, a blocking expedition of the type which proved successful in 1918 was preferable to casting away hundreds of thousands of troops.

As a matter of fact, however, the Flanders offensive was planned by Haig as far back as November 17th, 1916, i.e. long before the opening of the sharpened Submarine war, or the collapse of Nivelles's offensive. He reverted to the idea as soon as he found himself emancipated from the order to conform to Nivelles's movements.

The offensive once begun, was opened late in the season and with delays between its various stages which proved of immense value to the enemy in strengthening his position and in bringing up reinforcements. The initial operation, the Battle of Messines, June 7th, opened brilliantly enough but was succeeded by a delay of six weeks ultimately fatal to any chance of great tactical successes. The weather broke, floods of rain reduced the ground to a quagmire. Tanks which would have been of enormous value against the German "pill-boxes," sank in the morass. The British army wallowed slowly through a sea of mud to attack German positions which were carefully fortified, manned by an alert and watchful enemy, who was being continually reinforced from the Eastern Front. There were lost 400,000 men in the effort to break through the enemy's lines under conditions such as these.<sup>1</sup>

It has been asserted that had the British Army not attacked in the Autumn of 1917, the enemy would have done so, and the initiative would have passed into his hands. This assertion is scarcely credible. Even in 1918 the Germans had a superiority of not more than 350,000 rifles on the West Front; it is doubtful if their total superiority, for practical purposes, was more than 500,000 men. In 1917 they were certainly inferior to the British and French in men and guns and material. It is improbable that they would have attempted an attack under extremely disadvantageous circumstances. Neither Hindenburg nor Ludendorff cared for long drawn-out indecisive battles with big casualty lists. Whatever plans the Germans had for the latter part of 1917, an offensive on the West Front would not appear to have been part of them.

And again, could not a British Offensive in the West

<sup>1</sup> Including killed, wounded and missing.

Front have been delivered in a better chosen region than Flanders? Petain, the French Commander-in-Chief, urged Haig in October 1917 to join him in a combined offensive. Haig absolutely refused to do so. He proposed to continue the attack in Flanders and was confident that if not in 1917, then at latest about March 1918, the German line would be broken, and that they would be forced to evacuate the sea-coast and to rest their flank on the Dutch frontier near Roulers. When reminded that the year 1918 would probably witness a concentration of the entire German Army in the West and a great German offensive, he replied that the French were strong enough to hold their own positions and that his own attacks would draw German troops against him, and render the task of the French easier.<sup>1</sup>

It is plain that the battering-ram tactics were to be continued indefinitely. But what great strategic result could be truly expected from the capture of Ostende and Zeebrugge is not quite clear. No doubt the loss of the Belgian sea-coast would have been a moral blow to Germany, it would have been a moral gain to the Allies. But it would have been very far indeed from inflicting a *crushing disaster* upon the German Army. This would have fallen back to another line, with its flanks secure on the Dutch frontier,<sup>2</sup> and the battering-ram tactics would have had to be begun all over again. At this rate one feels inclined to agree with the remark quoted by the authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, as coming from a soldier, that "the last five years" would have been the worst of the war.

<sup>1</sup> These views were expressed to Repington by Kiggel, Haig's Chief of Staff.

<sup>2</sup> The German army was able to survive the moral effects of the retirement to the Hindenburg line in 1917; why should it have been unable to survive the fall of Ostende? There is a big difference between retirement carried out at leisure and retirement after a break-through as at Amiens, August 8th, 1918.

It has been asserted that the deterioration of the German Army in 1918 was a result of the "wearing-out" battles, that victories such as that of August 8th could not have been won except as coming after the fighting on the Somme and in Flanders. But "wearing-out" had had, in practice, results little less disastrous to the British Army than to the Germans. Instances of low *moral* quoted by Ludendorff in his own army, can easily be paralleled by similar instances in our own. A careful study of the battle of August 8th shows the British success to have been due to good staff-work, surprise, and an overwhelming superiority at the decisive spot. Certainly not to low enemy *moral*. When demoralization *did* set in, general weariness due to the long duration of the War, a general conviction that it was useless to fight longer as millions of American troops would be coming on the scene, the reaction from the high hopes of the offensive to the despair of the retreat, and Bolshevik propaganda among the rank and file, had all little less potent influence than the "wearing-out" battles. Certainly had Haig in 1918 pursued the tactics of 1916 and 1917, the battle of August 8th would have been a second Somme, and "wearing-out" would have gone on indefinitely.

Looking at the matter dispassionately, it scarcely seems that the extension of the Flanders offensive over a period in which heavy rains had rendered the country almost impossible, brought any results to the Allies comparable to the heavy sacrifices entailed. Surely it would have been a wiser policy to have conserved our forces for the coming ordeal. The gains made by the British armies in five months of bitter bloody fighting, backed by artillery upon an unprecedented scale, were retaken by the Germans almost within as many days, when *their* offensive came. It seems that it would have been a wiser policy, once it became clear that Russia

had collapsed and that there was little chance of doing anything decisive until America had come into line, to have followed a defensive policy on the Western Front and to have snatched victories elsewhere. It seems strange that none of those "experts" who railed against "side-shows" and who proclaimed themselves "confirmed Westerners" should ever have thought that the wisest thing to do with "side-shows" was to wind them up successfully, and *then* concentrate in the West. The Germans were less dogmatic in their views. They very rightly regarded the War as a whole, not as a matter of "East" and "West" and snatched successes wherever possible. In the campaign against Serbia in 1915 we see German troops rushed to the south-east to deliver a smashing blow, and then rushed away again. In 1916 and 1917 we see German troops repeatedly delivering smashing blows in Italy, and then being swiftly moved elsewhere. Something of the same spirit on the part of the Allied General Staffs, and in particular, on the part of the British General Staff, might have led to successes which would have profoundly influenced the general military situation. The opportunity missed in Roumania in 1916 has been sufficiently dwelt upon. But it is surely instructive to think of what might have conceivably happened, if two British divisions, at the time of the Battle of Gaza, had been suddenly landed in the Turkish *rear*.<sup>1</sup> It was an operation perfectly feasible, which a commander of the calibre of Allenby would have willingly undertaken, *if* he had had the troops to spare. In that case, the Turkish Army, totally destroyed, would have ceased to be a factor in the War, Alexandretta and Damascus would have fallen into British hands. Coming in the midst of a disastrous year such successes would have had a welcome effect upon public feeling.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wolseley's attack at El Teb.

A swift sudden offensive from Salonica, about this time, would probably have put Bulgaria out of the War. We may compare Hindenburg's statement already quoted with a remark made by the British General, Briggs, in command of the Thirteenth Corps on the Salonica front, that the Bulgarians were sick of the War and that a single British division would have been enough to sway the balance. It is hard to see why the British General Staff should, so far as concerned the conduct of the War as a whole, consistently have left all initiative to the enemy. Two British divisions having intervened to effect the destruction of the Turkish army at Gaza could then have been sent to Salonica. A break-through there, and the rout of the Bulgarian army would probably have led to both Turkey and Bulgaria making peace. As matters were, the Germans seized the initiative in *their* hands. Caporetto, won by German troops in the very midst of Haig's Flanders offensive, sent British and French divisions whirling along in frantic haste through the plains of Italy. There could be no talk of east or west when the Italian Ally threatened to "crack up." So we see the policy of "confirmed westernism" ending in Haig, Robertson, Petain and Foch, all dancing to the tune that Hindenburg was piping.

By the close of 1917 the breach between Mr. Lloyd George and his military advisers had become a matter of public knowledge. In a speech on November 13th he said some things which, whilst no doubt true, were sacrceely complimentary to the Allied Military Leadership, and which under the circumstances had been better left unsaid. "We have won great victories. When I look at the appalling casualty lists I sometimes wish it had not been necessary to win so many. . . . When we advance a kilometre into the enemy's lines, snatch a small scattered village out of his cruel grasp

and capture a few hundred of his soldiers, we shout with unfeigned joy.”

However indiscreet it may have been, the speech only gave utterance to what all England was thinking. The public was tired of great newspaper victories which never seemed to lead us any “for’arder,” and to statements as to the enemy’s alleged demoralization which were promptly given the lie to, by vigorous blows directed against us. The public was in the position of the American soldier who during the Civil War, being told, “the enemy are retreating,” retorted grimly, “Look’s as if they’re retreating *after us*” !

The only thing that can be said against Mr. Lloyd George for thus giving utterance to public sentiment, is that it was unfair to keep Robertson and Haig in a position of power and responsibility, and then to indulge in public criticism of their actions. In particular it was Robertson who, as C.I.G.S. was more to blame for the Somme offensive, the collapse of Roumania, and the Flanders fiasco, than Haig. It was Robertson’s duty as C.I.G.S. to take broad views of the War, and not to allow himself to become absorbed in one front to the exclusion of everything else. And again, in considering the public criticism which Mr. Lloyd George was thus making upon our military leadership, it must not be forgotten that Robertson had undoubtedly been guilty of what, viewed mildly, must be considered as grave indiscretions in repeatedly giving Colonel Repington information as to what passed at official meetings, which the latter used as a basis for articles attacking the policy of the Government. Colonel Repington’s diary is damning evidence in this respect. No doubt both Robertson and Repington were animated by the very best of motives. But it is no part of the duty of a C.I.G.S. to indulge in tittle-tattle as to what passes before



him in his official capacity, in particular if the person with whom he is tittle-tattling happens to stand in acknowledged relationship with influential organs of the press. If the military adviser fails to see eye to eye with his chief, the proper course is for him to tender his resignation.<sup>1</sup> But to resort to popular clamour to force civilian ministers into a course of action which they disapprove, can scarcely be justified upon grounds of military expediency, and can scarcely be recommended as likely to lead to cordial and whole-hearted co-operation. That this sort of thing done repeatedly ultimately led to Robertson's dismissal, can hardly be regarded as surprising. The only surprising thing is that it did not come sooner. In fairness to Mr. Lloyd George it must be said that he showed a great deal of loyalty in the face of a policy with which he disagreed, and in face of enormous casualty lists. Everything has its limits. No Governments can indulge in Sommes and in Passchendaeles indefinitely. And it must be remembered that it was at this time, when Caporetto had come as showing what an offensive carried out with masterly skill could achieve, when Cambrai opening with the bright promise of victory, had ended in a disaster which gave reason to feel that there was something lacking in British leadership, that the military authorities were putting forward new demands for men. The army was faced with a deficit in the ranks which the civilian ministers might reasonably feel to be due to a needlessly wasteful procedure on the part of the military authorities. A particularly drastic enforcement of the Conscript-

<sup>1</sup> Robertson at the time of the Salonica episode wished to resign but was dissuaded by Repington who, apparently without telling the C.I.G.S. what he was about to do, invoked Lord Northcliffe and inspired articles in the press. But it certainly was an indiscretion on Robertson's part to tell Repington confidential matter of this type. He cannot have been ignorant subsequently that Repington was publishing material given to him.

tion Acts was called for at a time when the country in general was weary of the War and all the sacrifices it entailed ; when the triumph of Bolshevism in Russia had unquestionably given rise to subterranean revolutionary currents in the North of England, and when Government and People viewed the Flanders episode with suppressed resentment.

No doubt it was a feeling as to the danger of " swapping horses whilst crossing a stream " which prevented the Prime Minister, who made no secret of his dissatisfaction with the military leadership of the War, from giving Robertson his *congé*. But the course which he actually did follow, that of a half-hearted, grudging support, was perhaps even more dangerous than a change of leadership would have been. The request for drafts upon the immense scale asked for was refused. This in view of Haig's statement that the continuation of the Flanders offensive was the best way he knew of for attracting and using up the Boches, but that he could not go on with it if he were not adequately supplied with drafts,<sup>1</sup> had the effect of ruling out any repetition of the Flanders offensive. If it may be conceded that Haig at this time appears to have learnt nothing from the lesson of Cambrai ; that a Flanders offensive in 1918 would have no more averted the German onslaught of March 21st than it averted the disaster of Caporetto ; and that the British armies, caught in the midst of the mud of Flanders, might conceivably have been worse situated to deal with a great enemy offensive than was actually the case ; a policy of obstruction on the part of the British Government as against the Military Authorities would not appear to have been wise or dignified. If they were dissatisfied with Haig's leadership it was their place to remove him from his command and to install someone whom they thought better. To view

<sup>1</sup> Repington, Vol. II, p. 173.

the Commander-in-Chief with doubt and distrust and at the same time to leave him the responsibility for the lives and well-being of upwards of a million combatant troops, hardly seems the supreme height of statesmanship. Nor, if it be conceded that the demands of the military party were lacking in a sense of proportion, e.g., it was gravely proposed by Repington and others to apply conscription to Ireland, a measure which would probably have meant an armed rebellion and have required more troops to enforce it than could have been gained therefrom, the army in the field should at least have been kept up to strength. At the beginning of 1918 divisions had to be reduced from 12 battalions to 9. If the effect of all this upon the *moral* and organization of the troops has been greatly exaggerated, there would not seem in practice to be any great difference between a brigade of three battalions and one of four; it meant unquestionably a reduction in the strength of the army.

Mr. Lloyd George's excursions into the strategy of the War at this period cannot be considered particularly useful. The burning question in view of the expected German offensive in 1918 was that of unity of command. An Allied War Committee was assembled at Versailles consisting of the Allied Premiers and four military advisers, Sir Henry Wilson for Great Britain, Foch for France and Cadorna for Italy. Pershing represented America. The problem, however, bristled with difficulties. No one country cared to place its army under the command of a foreign officer. After much debate the by no means happy expedient was suggested of a reserve army made up of divisions from the various Allied armies, this to be "put in" by Foch who was to command it, upon his own initiative, wherever and whenever he thought best. It was an ingenious expedient

designed to give Foch most of the powers of a commander-in-chief but without giving him the prestige of this office or control over the front as a whole. The proposal, however ingenious from the political standpoint, had very decided disadvantages from the military, and perished still-born. Mr. Lloyd George's proposal for a defensive attitude in the West and an offensive in the East aroused much controversy. It was hotly opposed by the French, always preoccupied with their own front, and they would appear from Colonel Repington's Diary, to have given him information to publish in the British Press against it. The most, however, that could be said against the proposal was that it came rather late in the day. The latter part of 1917 would have been the best time for adopting such an attitude. In that case Turkey and Bulgaria could have been knocked out of the War, which would have meant that either the Germans must have sent troops to oppose the Allies in these regions, which would have weakened their 1918 offensive, or that the armies from Syria and Salonica would have been available for transfer almost *en bloc* to the West.

Looking at the matter broadly, however, there was much to be said, at the beginning of 1918, in favour of an Eastern offensive. The success of the German offensive was as unexpected as the success of the subsequent Allied counter-offensive. It was very generally believed that the year 1918 would be a year of stalemate, and that victory would be decided by the Americans in 1919. It seemed reasonable to believe that if the Allies upon the Somme and in Flanders, possessed of a superiority far exceeding that which the Germans were likely to have over the Allies in 1918, were able to gain no great decisive results, the Germans in taking the offensive in *their* turn, would not be more successful. And this was a forecast which came well within the truth,

for the Germans whilst gaining very large and spectacular successes, failed very decisively in achieving their larger strategic objectives. Thus, assuming that 1918 would be a year of stalemate, there was much to be said in favour of a policy of knocking out Turkey and Bulgaria. It is significant in this connection that it was not until Franchet d'Esperay's offensive from Salonica had caused Bulgaria to throw up the sponge, and had confronted Germany with the necessity of forming a new front in the South-east, that the German military party finally confessed that it was hopeless to continue the War.

An excursion into the military sphere in reality far less pardonable than the eastern project, was the pressure brought upon Haig to take over a portion of the French line. It was a measure to which the British Commander-in-Chief assented against his better judgment and which, coupled with the bad leadership of the Fifth Army, had more to do with the subsequent disaster than either the Eastern project or the alleged shortage of men. The British line was too thinly held to put up a truly effective resistance. This was a measure urged by Mr. Lloyd George at the bidding of the French; Haig might well have made a stronger stand against it. We are told by the authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command* that the extent of front taken over by the British was less than that urged upon them by the French, and that Haig warned the Government that he would not be responsible for the safety of the Channel Ports if this demand was acceded to, which was "equivalent to a threat of resignation!"<sup>1</sup> There is no record, however, of Haig actually tendering his resignation. He might well have done so in view of the reduced strength of his army, if called upon to take over an extra frontage. Eventually, the matter was

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 37.

compromised, but the British were given 125 miles extra to defend. Colonel Repington, who about this time published an article upon the Supreme War Council in *The Morning Post*, repeating substantially all that had passed at Versailles, carefully kept silence as to the great and unfair burden placed upon the British army, to please the French. No doubt he would have displeased his French friends had he done so.

Hard upon the episode of the Versailles War Council came the great German offensive of March 21st, 1918. The storm broke with a force and fury which staggered the world. In days of fierce fighting the Germans recaptured ground which had cost the British months of desperate and bloody effort to achieve. But the German advance slowed down amid the disorganization of a victorious fight, artillery and supplies had to be brought up, over a devastated country. The British troops rose with determined courage to the occasion. It became apparent to the German Higher Command that Amiens, their real objective, could not be achieved. The battle ebbed. The British Government showed energy and vigour. The Conscription Acts were tautened up. The Nation under pressure of imminent danger accepted without a murmur sacrifices, which if called upon to make earlier would have aroused widespread discontent, and even, perhaps, revolution. The episode of Sir Frederick Maurice deciding to deliberately contradict statements made by Mr. Bonar Law and by Mr. Lloyd George in the House of Commons with regard to man-power, and publishing a letter to this effect in *The Morning Post* may be compared with Repington's shell "stunt." Even if true it would seem to be a wrong and senseless procedure to have attempted to shake the confidence of the country in its Government at the very moment when the stupendous

military drama was marching to its climax. Repington quotes Haig as saying that the Spirit of an Army was a delicate plant, and would not remain uninfluenced at last by the constant attacks against its leaders.<sup>1</sup>

Does not the same thing apply equally to a nation at a time of great crisis? With Repington publishing flaming attacks accusing the Prime Minister of every conceivable folly, and Sir Frederick Maurice publishing statements that responsible Ministers of the Crown had deliberately lied in speeches in Parliament, what Government could hope to hold the confidence of the Nation and to steer a decided course? We have Mr. Winston Churchill's evidence that the Asquith Cabinet was a more efficient instrument of War than the First Coalition Government which succeeded it, we have Colonel Repington telling us in no undecided tones that the Second Coalition Government was much less efficient than the First: would a *Third* Coalition Government have brought us nearer to winning the War? Or would it merely have meant worse confusion? Whatever the ignorance and folly of which civilian ministers might be accused, the soldiers would seem to have displayed a conspicuous lack of wisdom or of moderation.

In May the Germans struck again, this time against the French, and again secured successes. But the turn of the tide was now within sight. Close upon three-quarters of a million British and Dominion troops had filled up the gaps in the ranks due to the disasters earlier in the year, the Americans were pouring into France, the French army less worn by fighting during 1917 and 1918 than the British, was in good condition. Above all Foch was in supreme command, giving at least a unity to the Allied military operations heretofore lacking.

<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, Vol. II, p. 174.

The Second Battle of the Marne, 18th to 20th July, brought the German offensive against Paris to a hasty end, and the Battle of Amiens, August 8th, was in Ludendorff's words a "black day" in the annals of the German army. The authors of *Sir Douglas Haig's Command* have much to say about Foch's "crude plan" for this battle "scientised" by the British Commander-in-Chief, but it must not be forgotten that Foch's surprise tactics at the Second Battle of the Marne and Ludendorff's hammer-like blows in March and May had initiated Haig into a system of warfare, foreign heretofore to British military practice, as exercised upon a large scale. If the initiative lay with Haig in suggesting the actual point chosen for the attack, and if the battle was planned in a masterly fashion, the ultimate responsibility lay with Foch, and it must be attributed to greatness in the latter that he afforded Haig a measure of support which for whole-heartedness and loyalty has never been questioned, and that he did not hesitate in abandoning his own project for a scheme suggested by Haig which appeared superior. Nor, in considering the battle should the fine staff-work of the Australian and Canadian Corps be left without mention. More particularly as it was done exclusively by temporary officers.

But it would be altogether unfair and ungenerous to deny to Haig the credit for having risen to the occasion in a most superb fashion. The British Commander-in-Chief had shown a generosity of spirit and a broadness of vision in proclaiming his readiness to serve under Foch, after the disasters of March and April, for which he has scarcely received a due meed of public praise. In the Battle of Amiens, British leadership displayed a brilliance which does much to atone for former failures, and in the ensuing operations and the breaking of the Hindenburg Line, this high level of



achievement was even excelled. Yet the sustained operations of Foch all along the line, the French offensives in the Champagne, the American attacks in the St. Mihiel Salient and in the Ardennes, the coastal offensive of Courtrai and Roulers, all helped in producing a result which no one Ally can fairly claim to have won alone, and for which Foch as Supreme Commander controlling the general movements of the armies must be awarded a just meed of praise. But for this good general leadership, the Second Battle of the Marne would not have produced effects much more decisive than the First, and the Battle of Amiens, if a brilliant tactical success, would have been as barren of decisive results as the equally brilliant German gains in their March offensive.

The part played by the tanks in breaking the *moral* of the German armies at this phase has been conveniently ignored by the disciples of "wearing down." The sudden appearance of new and improved forms of tanks, for the first time<sup>1</sup> handled in great numbers and with definite tactical purpose, in conjunction with the other arms, did more to shake the German "*moral*" than all the fighting on the Somme and in Flanders. No doubt had the pressure been less sustained and overwhelming, they would quickly have developed means to counter and to defeat these swiftly-moving steel caterpillars. It must be put to the credit of Allied leadership in the Autumn of 1918 that the enemy was awarded no breathing spell to organize such counter measures.

Next to the tanks, the American troops if few in numbers during the decisive phase of the fighting, unquestionably exercised a very considerable moral effect. There are indeed no signs that the Germans regarded the Americans actually upon their front as specially formidable. In point of fact, the American attacks, unskilfully made, were accom-

<sup>1</sup> This does not exclude the Battle of Cambrai.

panied by a loss of life which, whilst it aroused admiration for the magnificent courage displayed, usually called forth unflattering comments from Germans, both official and unofficial. But the Germans realized clearly enough that these raw troops would soon settle down into hardy and experienced foemen, and they did not relish the prospect of having millions of new troops to face.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst an English writer may reasonably discount the somewhat exaggerated claims put forward by Americans as to the exhaustion of the Allies in 1918, it may be freely conceded that the victory of the Allies would have been far less speedy and decisive but for the presence of American troops. The breaking of the Hindenburg Line was mainly the work of the British and French Armies and it is doubtful if the absence of the American troops would have made any great difference. But the collapse of the War-spirit in Germany herself was unquestionably due in very large degree to a feeling of hopelessness caused by the prospect of having to face millions of American troops. But for this collapse of the War-spirit, the German Armies would probably have withdrawn to a defensive line along the Meuse, and, even if we concede Germany to have been more exhausted in men and material than the Allies, it is a fact that these were also in a state of great exhaustion, and it is probable that they would have been inclined to a peace by compromise. Germany would have evacuated Belgium and

<sup>1</sup> The writer had the curious fortune to be in Vienna when the German offensive began in March 1918. He boarded a tram-car and became an involuntary listener to a group of German men. They were talking about the Americans, and one man exclaimed, "The newspapers are telling us that the Americans won't come. But look how they sneered at Kitchener and said that the English army was all a bluff. It's all lies. I tell you the Americans will come just as the English did." There was a general murmur of assent from everyone listening.

perhaps Alsace-Lorraine, compensating herself no doubt by gains from Russia. Both sides would have claimed a glorious peace. That the Allies would have succeeded in imposing upon Germany anything like the crushing terms of the Peace of Versailles, without the help of America, can scarcely be maintained.

America entering the War played in 1918 very much the rôle planned by Kitchener for Great Britain in 1917. There is nothing disgraceful or discreditable to British statesmanship in admitting this. No one could have foreseen or anticipated the collapse of Russia, and the extra burden which this would throw upon the Allied armies. And it may be said, moreover, that the real object of British statesmanship in entering the War was not so much to crush Germany as to prevent Germany from crushing France and making herself the dominant power in Europe. The cry, "Hang the Kaiser!" "Make Germany pay!" was a product of war-psychology. In 1918, if without American support we should have been unable to really *crush* Germany, we should certainly have been able to prevent Germany from crushing France.

If British statesmanship on the whole emerges with credit from the War, British military leadership, using the word in its broadest signification, on two occasions conspicuously failed to rise to the full height of the opportunities afforded.

The first of these was the Battle of Jutland. On the 31st of May 1916 the British Grand Fleet for the only time during the War got the German High Seas Fleet under its guns. The British were in a crushing and overwhelming superiority. They had not merely twice as many battleships as the enemy, but ship for ship their vessels were larger, faster, and much more powerfully armed. Judged by all pre-war theories of a naval battle the German fleet should

have been destroyed. The German fleet was not destroyed. On the contrary, the British fleet sustained losses in ships and men very much exceeding those which it inflicted upon the far weaker enemy.

Special pleading of manifold art has been resorted to, to explain away results so unsatisfactory. Special pleading has been pressed to the extreme measure of evolving the curious doctrine that British battleships are built presumably to be put under a glass case and kept in a museum, not to be "risky" in battle.<sup>1</sup> But the truth is that the Battle of Jutland, instead of being the great victory it could have been had an Admiral of the type of Beatty been in command, was an indecisive battle which failed to affect the general situation one way or the other. If the British fleet after this battle was successful in maintaining the blockade and safeguarding the transport of troops and supplies, the German fleet was equally successful in keeping the British fleet from the Baltic Sea and the German coasts. For more than two years after the "victory" of Jutland, the German fleet exercised an influence upon the strategy of the war which

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon may be quoted as the most prominent protagonist of this theory. The same writer in a recent work, *The Scandal of Jutland*, considers Lord Beatty "rash" and "inexperienced" for not having opened the action with Von Hiepper's battle-cruisers, which were inferior to his own, by a retirement upon the Fifth Battle Squadron; in other words, it is here laid down as a doctrine that it is the sacred duty of a British Admiral engaging an inferior enemy to start the battle by running away!

No one wishes to be unfair or ungenerous to Admiral Jellicoe, who was in a position of enormous responsibility, but distinguished admirals have got to learn that the public is sick of special pleading to explain away failure. No doubt Jellicoe won a negative sort of victory in saving his own fleet from disaster. But as the enemy's fleet was less than half as strong as his own, the public fails to find anything particularly Nelsonic about his actions. It is not necessary to take German reports at their face value to feel that more daring and decided leadership would have produced more tangible results.

brought the British Empire to the verge of ruin. The British Admiralty was unable to guarantee the coasts of England against invasion, thus *eight divisions* were kept in idleness at home instead of being used for offensive purposes. The necessity of keeping the Grand Fleet in constant readiness to engage the enemy resulted in vast numbers of destroyers and small craft being employed in escort and scouting duty at a time when the submarine-boat war was playing havoc with our commerce and we were desperately short of small craft to deal with them. Finally, the presence of the German High Seas Fleet *in being* effectually warded off any attempt to deal with the submarines by *offensive* measures, such as barrages of mines opposite the German harbours.

It is a fact not generally realized that Lord Jellicoe, whose conduct of the Battle of Jutland has given rise to so much criticism, proved equally unsuccessful as First Sea Lord in dealing with the German Submarine War. Revelations by Admiral Sims have since shown how terrible was the havoc wrought by the German submarines and how misleading were the statistics as to sinkings published by the British Admiralty.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lloyd George is quoted as having said, ". . . the Admiralty had been awful, and the present submarine menace was the result. . . . He thought that the apathy and incompetence of the naval authorities were terrible. . . . He said that at the time of the French Revolution, the heads of the incompetents would certainly have fallen."<sup>2</sup> Whilst the crisis was at its height, Jellicoe is quoted as full of gloom and pessimism and as saying, "The Army must win the War." The phrase became current, "Can the Army win the War before the Navy loses it?" An illuminating commentary upon the victory of Jutland! Ultimately we

<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Cope Cornford, *The Paravane Adventure*.

<sup>2</sup> Repington, Vol. I, p. 454.

find the Prime Minister giving Jellicoe his *cong *, and the U-Boat problem finally mastered.

The naval situation so profoundly influenced the general military situation, that no apology is required for dealing briefly with factors generally ignored, in estimating the military problem which confronted Lord Kitchener's successors. It is just possible that but for the initial failure to destroy the German fleet at the Battle of Jutland, the second great failure of the Allies, the Roumanian Campaign, would not have occurred. The eight divisions asked for by Mr. Lloyd George, for Salonica, were actually in Great Britain, but they were earmarked for Home Defence as the Navy refused to give guarantees against invasion. Thus, whilst these divisions were eating their heads off in idleness, Roumania was overwhelmed and destroyed by Von Hindenburg. When we remember that Germany in 1918 threw up the sponge when Bulgaria sued for peace and she found herself called upon to form a new front in the South-east; when we remember that her position in 1916 appeared little less desperate than in 1918, it becomes clear that a really bold and combined offensive would probably have led to her collapse two years earlier. The peace-feelers which she put out after the fall of Bucharest and the decision to retreat to the Hindenburg Line taken in *December* 1916, almost simultaneously, make it clear that a few great Allied victories in the Balkans, and the menace to Budapest and Vienna, would have found the Teutonic Empires anxious to open *pourparlers* for peace.

Unhappily, all through the War, from the time of Lord Kitchener's death to the time of the disastrous German offensives of 1918, we find a conspicuous lack of vision and *team-work* among the Allies. Army and Navy, Soldier and Civilian, Englishman, Frenchman, Italian, Belgian and Serb,

all had their own axes to grind, their own pet theories to air. If there were no lack of zeal, and no lack of enthusiasm, no lack of financial strength and of material resources, there was a real and terrible lack of vision and of unity. The death of Lord Kitchener had left a gap in the Allied Counsels, in this respect, which none of his successors came anywhere near to replacing. Not until the thunderstrokes of Ludendorff hammering on the Western Front had put the Fear of God into every Allied Statesman, do we find Unity of Command and Unity of Effort translated from terms of vague idealism into the realms of accomplished fact. And it was Unity not merely in the sense of "Westernism!" Foch, smiting the Teuton hip and thigh, found time to think of broader issues. Franchet d'Esperay from Salonica, Allenby in Palestine, swept forward in one grand combined offensive, which brought about the end of the War.

## NOTES

*Hindenburg on Roumanian Campaign.*—"It is certain that so relatively small a state as Roumania had never before been given a rôle so important. . . . Never before had two great powers such as Germany and Austria found themselves so much at the mercy . . . of a country with scarcely one-twentieth of the population of the two great states."—*Out of my Life*, p. 199.

*The Territorials and Drafting.*—The inherent defects of the Territorial system, considered as a basis for a foreign service army, become apparent when we reflect upon the manner in which Territorial Divisions at the Dardanelles dwindled away. Battalions sank to mere companies. A draft of 20,000 men sent to Sir Ian Hamilton contained only 750 Territorials. The explanation was that Territorials, even when they accepted the liability for foreign service, did so only for their particular units, and could only be used for drafting subject to their own consent.

*The Fifth Army in March 1918.*—In fairness to the Fifth Army it should be mentioned that from March 21st, when the German offensive began, till March 28th, the reserves sent to them were upon a ludicrously inadequate scale, and that no orders nor "directives" were received from the British Commander-in-Chief.—*Vide Official Diary G.H.Q.*

## CHAPTER VIII

### LORD KITCHENER'S RÔLE DURING THE WORLD-WAR

**A** COOL and balanced appreciation of Lord Kitchener's rôle during the World-War can hardly fail to take note of the fact that he assumed the Office of Secretary of State for War under circumstances of enormous and unprecedented difficulty, that he unquestionably performed services of immense magnitude during the most difficult and dreary phase of the war; and that his successors when called upon to face problems infinitely less complex, usually made a sorry showing. Writers of the type of Lord Esher have much to say as to Lord Kitchener's alleged shortcomings but few words to spare as to the unfairness of the rôle thrust upon him, the enormous handicaps placed upon his work by the total lack of foresight on the part of his predecessors, the immense courage and profound wisdom which he displayed. Still less does it ever occur to them to weigh up Lord Kitchener's achievements with those of his successors, and to strive to strike a balance between what might be described as hasty criticisms uttered upon the spur of the moment, and with little real knowledge behind them, and the just and temperate criticism which comes from broadness of outlook and mature reflection. There is a certain disunion among the critics of Lord Kitchener. Lord Esher



speaks, referring to Mr. Lloyd George, of "the legitimate ambition of a man who was to lead the people of England with such fire and vigour that their fleets and armies were able ultimately to achieve what in May 1915 seemed beyond achievement." Colonel Repington, certainly no less well-informed, speaks of the same personage disrespectfully as a "skeleton in the closet of British Statesmanship." Lord Esher speaks of "the mortifying contrast between the place which he (Kitchener) occupied in the public esteem and what he knew to be the inner mind of those earnest men whom he vainly tried to influence and guide." Colonel Repington speaks of "those earnest men" as "a pack of ignorant politicians." Elsewhere Lord Esher gives us a singular picture of the way in which "those earnest men" whom Lord Kitchener "vainly tried to influence," went about their business. "All the talking was done by the people least competent to discuss the subject. The Lord Chancellor delivered an exceptionally long harangue on strategy. The Secretary of State for War said nothing." Certainly, the impression of "those earnest men" which we get from Colonel Repington's Diary, and kindred works, is more that of a collection of maiden ladies meeting for tea and tittle-tattle, and rending with unanimous consent, the member of the party, who happened to be absent, than that of *statesmen* entrusted with the guidance of their country's fortunes at a supreme moment of destiny. Lord Kitchener as the member of this little tea-party who was always absent, would seem to have come off badly amid the general atmosphere of gossip and click-clack. But, however brave his colleagues were behind his back, they seldom had courage to say things face to face. We hear of an incident between Lord Kitchener and Mr. Lloyd George in which the Secretary of State for War gathered up his papers and declared

that if he did not possess the confidence of his colleagues he would prefer to resign. There followed a very prompt "explanation" and Lord Kitchener was appeased.

That Lord Kitchener was accepted by the Cabinet unwillingly, as a necessary evil, becomes clear when we consider the care taken before the war to find "jobs" for him out of the country, and the manner in which he had been kept at arm's length from all discussions upon Imperial Defence. If the Asquith Cabinet had really *wanted* Kitchener, it seems hard to tell why they should not have entrusted him with a post upon the Army Council corresponding to that of the First Sea Lord, *before* the War.<sup>1</sup> And that once the first shock of War had passed, once the sense of imminent danger was over, many of the civilian ministers, politicians trained in the school of party-intrigue and party-warfare, were disposed to regard it as a mistake to have invited a soldier to become a member of the cabinet, and to meet ministers on equal terms, can scarcely be doubted. As the war went on there was much talk in secret of a "military dictatorship," much tendency to dwell upon alleged mistakes and shortcomings, much talk that Lord Kitchener should be given some "great position" as a Commander-in-Chief, etc. Mr. Asquith, once having put his hand to the plough and having called Lord Kitchener into council, must be awarded the credit of having afforded him whole-hearted support. The same thing cannot honestly be said for Mr. Lloyd George. The future Prime Minister appears to have indulged freely in disparaging criticisms of his military colleague, and to have encouraged the submerged attacks upon him. It cannot be ignored in this connection that Viscount French after having, subsequent to Lord

<sup>1</sup> The War Office Administration had been reorganized upon "naval" lines after the South African War.

Kitchener's death, published a series of articles in *The Daily Telegraph* attacking Lord Kitchener's memory and making laudatory mention of Mr. Lloyd George, was raised by Mr. Lloyd George's Government to an earldom. It may be, of course, that Lord French's earldom was a reward for failing to suppress *Sinn Fein* in Ireland, and had nothing to do with *The Daily Telegraph* articles. But the coincidence was rather unfortunate.

Lord Kitchener's great service during the war was as an organizer rather than as a strategist. He must be awarded the credit of having seen farther into the realities of the situation than all the intellectual luminaries of the General Staffs in England or abroad, and of having set himself to organizing the resources of the Empire as a whole, and of Great Britain in particular, upon the basis of a prolonged war lasting many years, and which would involve great battles fought upon the Continent of Europe by armies of millions of men. He had perceived all this, and had set into train his gigantic organization for raising the new armies at a time when men such as French, Robertson and Wilson, after years of study of the military situation in Europe, with the reports of highly-trained intelligence officers at their disposal, thought that the war would be over by the Christmas of 1914.

Lord Kitchener's work as an Imperial Strategist deserves to rank very high, far higher than is commonly accepted. He frequently accepted risks which his successors refused to contemplate. At a time when the Navy declined to make any guarantee against invasion he sent the Sixth Division to join French at the Battle of the Aisne and the Seventh Division in time for the Battle of Ypres. Yet these were the only regular troops available for the defence of the United Kingdom. His successors retained eight good

divisions for defensive purposes even when, as at the time of the Roumanian Campaign and the German offensive of 1918, the weakness of the Expeditionary Forces overseas was pregnant with disaster to the cause of the Allies. In stripping India of her British regular troops, Kitchener displayed an amount of courage for which he has seldom been given due credit. Sedition had been rife in India before the war, there had been many assassinations of British officials, it had been necessary to pass special Acts to deal with agitators. Moreover, German agents were known to be busy in fomenting unrest in the country. A lesser man might well have hesitated at withdrawing the white regular troops who were the backbone of British rule in that vast region. Had a disaster occurred the powerful Anglo-Indian coteries at home would have called for Kitchener's head upon a charger. Yet he accepted the risk and during the most critical days of the war, division after division of solid highly-trained regular troops came to reinforce French's troops, weary and battle-worn after the First Ypres.

Prompt and skilful measures were taken for the defence of the Suez Canal, and whilst he was opposed to the Mesopotamia enterprise, and disapproved, very rightly, of the policy which thrust forward Townshend's small force to Baghdad and the disaster of Kut, he was always in favour of offensive measures against Turkey. Had not the Dardanelles Expedition intervened, his policy would assuredly have been to land troops at Alexandretta. He was opposed to a policy of "side-shows" and to splitting up our forces indiscriminately, even whilst refusing to commit himself to blind "westernism." Egypt *had* to be defended because the Suez Canal was of vital importance to us. And the best way to defend is to attack. Again, when the Salonica Expedition was mooted it seemed to be a case of bringing

Greece into the war to cover Serbia threatened by Bulgaria. The Allies went to Salonica at the invitation of M. Venizelos and at a time of imminent peril to the smallest and weakest of our Allies. The failure was here not a military failure but a diplomatic one. Greece at a time when she was ready and willing to come in on the side of the Allies was snubbed; Bulgaria, which could have been conciliated by concessions, was alternately bullied and coaxed. And when she had finally made up *her* mind, much time was lost unnecessarily whilst the Allies were making up *theirs*.

Lord Kitchener once said to Mr. Winston Churchill when the latter was propounding one of his grandiose schemes, "We cannot make war as we should like to do so, but as we *must*." When we analyse the work done by Kitchener as an Imperial Strategist, we are struck by a certain absence of preconceived theory, a certain broadness of outlook, a certain tendency (to use homely phraseology) to hit an enemy's head wherever it cropped up, and with whatever lay first to hand. Usually we see him doing, what *had* to be done, and doing it as well as possible with the best means he had to spare. The broad outlines of his strategy were dictated by the sheer necessities of the military situation. Turkey was in the war, threatening Egypt, our vital link with the East, Turkey *must* be smashed, France threatened to crack up under the German offensive, France *must* be supported, Serbia was threatened by Bulgaria, Greece needed encouragement to come in, Allied troops *must* be sent to Salonica. We see about Kitchener's work at this period less brilliant imagination revelling in audacious plans for the discomfiture of the enemy, than cool methodical calculation and deep reflection upon the military situation. In general his inclination during those early months of the war was unquestionably to stand upon the defensive, to

gather strength, and *then* to strike and to strike hard. He was opposed, and as the issue showed, rightly opposed, to Joffre's plans for an offensive in 1915; had he been able to consult his own wishes it is probable that the great offensive of the Allies in the West would have occurred late in 1916. Yet, if the French were determined to attack, it was impossible for the British armies to refuse all measure of co-operation, in particular in view of the effect of the Russian disasters. Thus we find the British War Minister yielding unwillingly to the logic of facts. It is hard to imagine Lord Kitchener as conceiving a Dardanelles Expedition. Brilliantly imaginative schemes were foreign to a nature which had more of the Moltke than of the Napoleon. Yet the idea propounded, he was quick to see all the possibilities the schemes suggested. Had he been left to work it out in his own fashion with deep reflection upon all the issues involved and nice calculation of means to end, no doubt we should have seen a deliberately prepared but swiftly-executed scheme which would have produced results as brilliant as Omdurman. But with Mr. Churchill rushing at things with the Navy, making attacks and getting beaten and calling upon Kitchener to help him out, with all this, combined with the pressure from other fronts, the Secretary of State for War started things under a terrible handicap.

There can be no doubt but that Kitchener liked and respected Churchill. The First Lord had earlier in life written a book reflecting upon Kitchener's Sudan campaign in no flattering terms, and it must be taken as indicating real greatness of spirit in the latter, that he met Churchill as a Colleague with no shadow of ill-will. Nor does he appear to have been slow to recognize the many great qualities of moral and physical courage, fiery energy, and daring vision which in the First Lord atoned for much that was

shallow and superficial, and an inflated style of oratory apt to set balanced minds against him. There can be no doubt but that the fact that upon entering the War Office he found nothing but disorganization, confusion, pettiness and a general lack of foresight, whereas the crisis of war found the Navy ready, and with definite plans worked out to meet emergencies, profoundly impressed Lord Kitchener. Mr. Churchill tells the story of Kitchener calling to see him at a time when he (Churchill) had been driven from office, and was almost without a friend in England, and saying, suddenly, "Well there's one thing at any rate they cannot take from you. The Fleet was ready." It must be attributed to some basis of very genuine merit in the character of the First Lord that in dealing with men such as Kitchener and Fisher, men who must certainly be ranked as the highest experts in warfare by land and sea whom the British Empire possessed, he was able to induce them to give serious attention to his projects and to treat his opinions with respect. And yet it must be taken as some element of weakness in the First Lord's character, that we find both Kitchener and Fisher reaching a point beyond which harmonious co-operation with this brilliant civilian was found to be impossible. The fact was that Mr. Churchill had brilliance but not depth. His impulsive mind jumped to conclusions not always justified by the cool and reasoned balancing of evidence, he was prone to become absorbed in the immediate situation to the exclusion of broader views of the war as a whole. His action at Antwerp, telegraphing to offer his resignation of the post of First Lord and requesting the command of the relieving force, may be quoted as a case in point. His daring and penetrating intellect was in no case balanced by any tendency to question the infallibility of his own judgment. Now it is an unfortunate fact that in these days of a highly

complex civilization and intensive specialization, the same man cannot be at one and the same time a Napoleonic genius in war by land, a Nelsonic genius in war by sea, an Edison, Parsons and Watts, all rolled into one, in mechanical science and research, a mixture of Gladstone and Chatham, as a politician and statesman, a brilliant man of letters, an international lawyer, and some half-a-dozen other things besides. Had the First Lord been satisfied to limit himself to one job and to do this *thoroughly*, it is unquestionable but that his great capacities would have been of signal service to his country. But his unfortunate tendency to engage himself in half-a-dozen diametrically differing projects at the same time, and to overrule the specialists entrusted with these various functions, his proneness to indulge in sudden enthusiasms for hastily-conceived schemes of action, and his deeply-rooted conviction that all who differed from him were timid and routine-ridden, would appear to have made him much of an *enfant terrible* at a time of great crisis. We find Mr. Churchill in the early days of the war literally bombarding his colleagues with memoranda upon every conceivable subject under the sun. Is it a debate upon the strategy of the war? Mr. Churchill is ready with cut and dried schemes worked out at five minutes' notice. Is there a debate upon military organization? We find Mr. Churchill wielding the pen of a Moltke, anxious to teach the soldiers their business. Is it a matter of aircraft? Mr. Churchill can give you a final pronouncement upon the most intricate problems involved. Now and then, as in the case of the tanks, we find Mr. Churchill encouraging something really useful, but usually, his schemes work out in practice, as the merest "hot air." Take, for instance, his plan based upon a statement by Lord Kitchener that troops could be taken from India, for concentrating 290,000 troops behind



the French left within forty days. When Lord Kitchener actually did take troops from India to form four new divisions, deficiencies in mobilization stores resulted in that it was not until January of 1915 that the last of these divisions could be sent to France, i.e. it took six months to complete a concentration which Mr. Churchill pictured as completed in less than six *weeks*. There is the same tendency to "hot air" in all his schemes. Take his lordly pronouncement that the crews of German submarine boats should be regarded as participants in a peculiarly disgraceful form of warfare and if taken prisoners should be given special treatment. Surely any child could have foreseen that this would involve German reprisals and be unworkable in practice? Yet we see Mr. Churchill blundering gaily into a course of action which led to a speedy and undignified retreat.

Mr. Churchill, unquestionably, figured as the Alcibiades of the Asquith Cabinet. His actions at Antwerp and the part taken by him in the Dardanelles Expedition gave legitimate scope for criticism. The public suspected him of an insane desire to pose in the limelight, a suspicion which his habitual use of inflated phraseology did not tend to minimise. Yet with all his defects Mr. Churchill, allied to a naval expert of the calibre of Lord Fisher, performed services to the country, which it would be unjust and ungenerous to deny full meed of appreciation; services which do much to explain the very real liking and respect which his colleagues felt for him even when they disagreed with him, and felt unable to continue to work in company. The gigantic building scheme evolved by Churchill and Fisher together, did much to save the situation in 1917, when the submarine crisis was at its height. Small craft had been till then among the most crying needs of the Navy. It can scarcely be doubted but that a combination of Churchill and

Fisher at the Admiralty would have shown themselves very much more vigorous and efficient in combating the submarine danger than their successors.

Whatever was the case subsequently to June 1915, when a meeting of the Cabinet was compared irreverently to a meeting of a Vestry with the Vicar in the Chair, the real War Cabinet from the outbreak of the war till that time appears to have been Asquith, Kitchener, Churchill and Fisher as naval expert. It is doubtful if any group of men have ever got through quite as much work for a given period. Kitchener raised, from the United Kingdom alone, 1,903,572 men, the Admiralty built or placed under construction a grand total of no less than 602 ships and small craft including battleships, battle-cruisers, destroyers, sloops, submarines, motor-launches and motor-lighters. There do not seem to have been the long and dreary discussions characteristic of the Coalition Government. Very important decisions were sometimes taken with a minimum of talk, e.g. the withdrawal of troops from India, the Antwerp Expedition, the despatch of the Sixth and Seventh Divisions. Viewed dispassionately the Asquith Cabinet may fairly claim to have shown a zeal and energy in carrying on the war which succeeding Cabinets never paralleled.

If Lord Kitchener, from the point of view of an Imperial Strategist, performed services of immense purport to the British Empire and to the World, if his views upon the general strategy of the war were fundamentally sound, and his broad vision and calm purpose were of incalculable value, it is as the Organizer and Creator of the New Armies rather than to his conduct of purely military operations that the greatest of War Ministers owes his lasting claim to fame. He was the Carnot of the British Empire, the organizer of victory. He it was who summoned great armies into being

almost with a stamp of the foot. His was the gigantic awe-inspiring figure about which the Nation rallied amid the shock of war. It has long been a source of debate with historians as to how far the great figures of history can truly be said to have influenced the destinies of mankind. Is it the "great man" who moulds his surroundings or the surroundings which mould the "great man"? Was it George Washington who "made" the American Revolution or the American Revolution which "made" George Washington? The answer is of course that the "great man" concentrates in his person the tendencies of his epoch, and reflects these back again in a manner to help on general progress. If we cannot conceive of George Washington as playing a great rôle in history without the general movement for revolt in the American Colonies, and the general impulse to resist by armed force what was felt to be the aggression of the Crown; yet equally we cannot conceive of this armed insurrection as proving militarily successful without the forceful genius and iron resolution of a Washington to transform the hastily-raised colonial levies into a powerful disciplined army. No doubt the American Revolution would ultimately have triumphed even without a Washington. But it would have meant a whole series of armed rebellions. America would have been a second Ireland. Ultimately a genius of Washington's calibre would have appeared on the scene, and in view of the general situation, it may be taken that the American arms would have been victorious.

In considering the rôle played by Lord Kitchener in the World-War, we may profitably add to this analogy an anecdote told by the veteran socialist Hyndman. The latter once with a friend, an undergraduate, watched a 'Varsity eight practising for the coming great race. The friend spoke with dissatisfaction of the stroke, "He's not much good."

“Perhaps,” suggested Hyndman, “in time the crew will improve the stroke.”

The friend turned on him in scorn. “That’s rot. A stroke can make a crew, but all the crews in the world can’t make a stroke.”

It was Lord Kitchener’s function during the World-War to act as “stroke” to the British Empire, to get his crew together rowing strongly and swiftly along a sea of blood and tears, with Death as the Timekeeper, and the Fate of Nations hanging upon the undaunted courage and stubborn Will of the men labouring at the oars. And the stroke started with a raw crew whilst the other boatmen were sturdy experienced oarsmen, but Kitchener trained his crew so well that when midway in the race he dropped dead, they were able to carry on and to win the race even if the stroke who succeeded him was not quite as good. That, put briefly, was Lord Kitchener’s rôle during the World-War. Could the British Empire have dispensed with Lord Kitchener as a stroke in those early years of the war, whilst the crew was still training? Was not a Kitchener as indispensable an element to the victory of the Allied Arms as Washington was to the success of the Americans in their Revolution? Surely the answer to all this can be found when we consider what would have happened had Lord Kitchener *not* been there.

Let us take, for example, Lord Haldane or Mr. Lloyd George appointed Secretary of State for War on that fateful August 5th, 1914. Kitchener we will imagine never to have been born. Now so far as concerned the mobilization of the Expeditionary Force and its despatch to France no great difference would have occurred. French would have had his four divisions, and his cavalry division. It is, however, extremely improbable that the Government would have

consented to the despatch of the Fifth Division which came in time for the Battle of the Marne, and of the Sixth and Seventh Divisions which were in time for the Aisne and First Ypres. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Kitchener was able to induce them to do these things. Great nervousness existed on the subject of invasion and the Navy declined to give a guarantee against this. A lesser man than Kitchener could scarcely have induced the Government, in view of the acknowledged unpreparedness of the Territorials, to run the risk of stripping the United Kingdom bare of regular troops. Passing this, it may be reasonably doubted, bearing in mind the despairing telegrams from French already quoted, whether there would have been a Battle of the Marne. Ignoring this point, it may reasonably be doubted whether in the absence of divisions kept in England, the First Battle of Ypres would have been a British victory. But all these are doubts which sink into insignificance in comparison with the loss which Kitchener's absence would have meant with regard to the New Armies. Save for Lord Kitchener there was no other soldier holding a responsible position who thought in terms of a prolonged war involving millions of men. It was only with greatest difficulty that he was able to lay hands upon a few officers to assist in training the new troops. Had he not been there, even these officers would have been swept off to France in common with practically every able staff-officer or formed body of regular troops. Thus the Government would have found a War Office staffed for the most part by elderly or infirm generals, and the country swept as bare of anything in the nature of military talent as, to use an expression of Sir Charles Callwell, "the back of a lady in fashionable evening-dress in 1918."

Next to Lord Kitchener, the man whose voice would have

been received by Government and People as authoritative upon matters of purely military technical import was the future Earl of Ypres, Sir John French. French's views that Kitchener was keeping back officers and N.C.O.'s vitally needed at the front to train vast armies which would not be ready till the war was over have already been quoted. The Government would have received no help or encouragement in raising great masses of new troops, from *that* quarter. Lord Roberts, the only other soldier who would have raised a voice in favour of raising great armies had been scoffed at for years as a conscriptionist and as an alarmist. Certainly the Government cannot be pictured as introducing compulsory service and as raising armies upon the magnitude required, at the urging of a man "written down" for years in their own party-organs. It was Lord Kitchener's reticence, which joined to his immense reputation, gave his words such crushing force in 1914. Lord Roberts, much as he was loved for his courage and his personal charm, was regarded as "impracticable" upon matters of National Defence, and as an idealist.

Government and People in 1914 were very far from realizing the immensity of the task in which we were engaged, as far remote from the actualities as most soldiers. It was very generally taken that we were in for a sort of glorified South African War; the shock once over we find the public soon settling down to look upon it almost as a pleasant and exciting spectacle. The cry arose, "Business as usual," and it was the thrilling call of Kitchener, the intensive recruiting campaign he inaugurated, which sent men trooping to the colours. Had Kitchener not been there we should have fallen back, no doubt, upon the Territorial scheme, and the theory of the Russian "Steam Roller." The fourteen Haldane divisions would probably have speedily filled up,

and would have settled down in six months or so into efficient troops. We may even conceive of the Government as ultimately adopting Kitchener's plan and raising second-line Territorials, and asking Territorial units to volunteer abroad. French, who opposed the project of sending "new army" divisions to his army, urging that new army troops should be mixed with existing formations by battalions and batteries, is scarcely likely to have been sympathetic to the project of using Territorials in divisions, despite the lip-service paid to them in "1914." In any case, however, it is clear that by the middle of 1915, not more than six divisions of Territorials would have been available to reinforce French's army, eight being earmarked for Home Defence. A very great difficulty would have risen over drafts for the regular army. Kitchener's "new army" men were regulars and available for drafting. The gaps in the ranks of the "old" battalions were filled up with amazing rapidity. French wrote to Kitchener expressing his amazement at the speed with which losses were made good. But the Territorials never showed any alacrity in volunteering for service with regular battalions. They were willing enough to serve abroad in their own units and under their own officers. But difficulties were experienced in persuading them to volunteer for drafting even into other Territorial battalions. It has been placed on record by Sir Ian Hamilton, that the regular army in time of peace had been dependent upon the "hungry hobbledehoy" for its stream of recruits. But "hungry hobbledehoy" would certainly not have been forthcoming in anything like the numbers necessary to replace losses in battles such as Mons, Ypres, Neuve Chapelle and Festubert, whilst the type of recruit who flocked to the "new armies" and Territorials, the intelligent artisan and respectable working-class man, was apt to be chary of en-

listing into the regular army direct. Thus by the beginning of 1915, but for the system introduced by Kitchener, we may conceive of the military authorities as at their wits' end to find drafts for the regular battalions.

Passing this, it may be pointed out that even if the whole of the fourteen Territorial divisions had been sent to France by the beginning of 1916 <sup>1</sup> this would have produced results infinitely less than those attained by Lord Kitchener. Including seven divisions of regular troops and two of Anglo-Indian troops, plus say two Canadian divisions, the grand total would have been twenty-five. Kitchener produced within the same period more than twice as many. Now it is important to remember that early in 1916 occurred the great Verdun offensive of the Germans, of which it has been recorded that "it came within a sufficiently narrow margin of knocking out France for good and all." Verdun marked the high-water mark of German military achievement. A series of brilliant victories had reduced Russia to temporary impotence, Serbia had been smashed, the German armies were flushed with victory, full of pride in their leaders, and of confidence in their power. But at this moment full of menace to the Allies and to the world, the measures taken by Lord Kitchener resulted in twelve hundred thousand British troops being placed in line with the French; in that the British armies were enabled to extend their lines and to set free twelve hundred thousand French troops to partake on the French side in the prolonged and desperate battles around Verdun. It may be said, with no hint of special pleading, that at Verdun it was the Kitchener armies which provided the narrow margin which saved France from being

<sup>1</sup> But Territorial troops would of course have been taken for the defence of Egypt, the Dardanelles, etc. This estimate is much too high.



knocked out for good and all. At Verdun, five hundred thousand fresh troops one way or the other would have sufficed to sway the balance. The Kitchener armies did much more than merely add twelve hundred thousand men to the French armies. They took away an equal number from the Germans. Von Falkenhayn could not leave the German lines opposite to those of the British bare of troops. Hundreds of thousands of good German troops who would otherwise have been fighting on the German side were kept in play by the British. And yet with all this we are told that Verdun came within a sufficiently narrow margin of knocking out France for good and all. Had the military effort made by Great Britain been less ; had a Haldane or a Lloyd George been Secretary of State for War in 1914, what would have happened to France in the Spring of 1916 ? It is taking an outside estimate in conceiving the strength of the British Expeditionary Force under the Territorial Scheme as five hundred thousand men ; where twelve hundred thousand men narrowly sufficed to avert disastrous defeat is it conceivable that five hundred thousand men would have sufficed to gain victory ? And what would a French defeat at Verdun have meant ? France disheartened by a series of disastrous defeats inflicted upon her Russian Ally, and with the Germans in full march upon Paris can scarcely be conceived as prepared to carry on an apparently hopeless struggle. Can we conceive of Lord French or Lord Haldane or even Mr. Lloyd George as heartening France on to renewed efforts by the vision of gigantic British armies in the course of making, and possessed of sufficient weight and prestige to induce the French to hearken to their words ? In 1916 it would have been too late to start talk of raising armies of millions of men. France and Russia would in all probability have made peace, and

Great Britain, had she stood out against Germany, would have had to face a warfare by submarines compared with which 1917 would have been child's play. All the ingenuity and wealth of material resources which Germany in that year was obliged to spend upon equipping her armies with munitions of war and offensive weapons, could have been lavished on her submarines. She would have been able to inaugurate a building programme for these at least two or threefold that which she was able to inaugurate in 1917. Calais and Boulogne would in all probability have been in her hands. If, ultimately, we may conceive of Great Britain as finding means to cope with these hornets of the sea, it is no less certain that the struggle would have been infinitely more costly than that of 1917, that it would have brought the United Kingdom to the very threshold of famine and of economic paralysis ; and that if Germany had been finally crushed, it would have been only after a war involving a series of continental coalitions, as in the case of France under Napoleon.<sup>1</sup>

It may fairly be claimed that in the Spring of 1916 it was the genius of Lord Kitchener which preserved the British Empire from consequences such as these. France at Verdun rose to the occasion with a heroism that was sublime, she produced a galaxy of brilliant leaders to conduct her defence, yet if heroism and genius conducted a determined defence the attack showed no lack of similar qualities. Had the *whole* of the German armies been able to come into action it can scarcely be doubted but that sheer weight of

<sup>1</sup> It would surely be to overstate the case to claim that the submarines would have sufficed to starve Britain into surrender. An increasingly intensive working of the U-boats would no doubt have led to the earlier adoption of the convoy system and other defensive measures. But, at best, the prospect outlined above would not have been inviting.

numbers must have finally overborne the desperate and gallant defenders. Even if we rule out the share taken by Lord Kitchener in the victories of the Marne and First Ypres, it may fairly be said of him in those dark and fateful Spring days in 1916, when the thunder of the German guns rose about Verdun, the earth quivered with the shock of armies, and mankind waited sick with fear of what the day's news might bring forth; it was that distant lonely figure in its shabby blue uniform, beaten upon by the storms of calumny and spite but far-seeing in vision and constant in resolve, which stood between the German armies and the Empire of the World. The British Empire had had the supreme fortune to find ready to its call the one man who, occupying a responsible military position, truly recognized the nature of the struggle in which we were involved, and who was possessed of sufficient weight and authority with Government and People, to induce them to take the bold and decided measures necessary for successfully carrying on the war. No doubt the British nation would have recognized ultimately the true needs of the situation, no doubt a War Office governed by a Haldane or a Lloyd George would have realized ultimately the necessity of raising armies of millions of men, no doubt the Haldane scheme provided a framework which *could* have been used to raise a great national army. But the point is that by the time Government and People had wakened up to the necessities of the situation, it would have been too late. Lord Haldane, one of the pillars of the Liberal Party at that period, had placed solemnly on record that "a Government must wait for Public Opinion." If the British Government in 1914 had waited for Public Opinion before they set themselves to the task of raising an army worthy to partake in great battles fought upon the Continent of Europe, what would have happened to France

at Verdun ? How long would it have been before the " Blue Water " school and all the other schools of military pedantry had ceased their wrangling ? Lord Kitchener did not wait for Public Opinion. He expressed his views upon the military situation as soon as he had taken office with a clearness and force and precision which no civilian War Minister had ever equalled. And the People of Great Britain, wise beyond their political leaders, rallied joyously to his call. What could be more absurd than Lord French, referring with shallow spite to the soldier who assumed a weight of responsibility such as no soldier had ever borne since the days of Cromwell ; who made it clear that he took office as a soldier and for the duration of the war, and was a member of no political party ; as a " politician " ? What could be more tragic than the spectacle of Great Britain drifting along like some rudderless ship to disaster had no Kitchener been there to lay a firm hand upon the helm of State, to lend Unity to her Councils and Foresight to her Resolve, and to stiffen the Will of her Island Race with the vision of great armies of free men going voluntarily into battle in their Country's Cause ?

Much has been written about Lord Kitchener's alleged shortcomings in the Munitions question. Yet when we consider Lord Kitchener as far back as the Autumn of 1914 issuing contracts for guns and munitions on the basis of an army in the field of 1,100,000 men, can we conceive of any *other* Government giving out contracts upon anything like the same scale ? Can we conceive of Lord Haldane or of Mr. Lloyd George in the Autumn of 1914 as contemplating an Army in the field of 1,100,000 men and as issuing contracts upon this basis ? If in practice the contracts given out by Lord Kitchener proved inadequate to the unprecedented demands of the war, how much *more* inadequate

would have been contracts which would have been issued upon the basis of the far smaller armies contemplated by all other British soldiers of light and leading, or by any civilian minister who may be conceived of as substituting Lord Kitchener? Is it not clear, moreover, that the Munitions Crisis experienced by the British armies in 1915 would have been experienced in 1916 had no Kitchener come to the War Office? Not until 1916 would it have become clear to the military authorities that great armies would be required and not until the attempt was made to raise great armies would the poverty of the land in respect to Munitions have become apparent. In 1916, with France beaten at Verdun, and Calais and Boulogne in German hands, we feel inclined to believe that any government which might have attempted to raise great armies and to equip them with arms and munitions of war, would have had difficulties to face even exceeding those which confronted Lord Kitchener. But in any case, it is plain that the Munitions shortage was part of the general shortage of material of war arising from the attempt to suddenly raise great armies where insignificant forces had existed heretofore, and that if we conceive of Mr. Lloyd George as Secretary of State for War in 1914, and if we conceive him, which is of course quite improbable, as possessed of sufficient grasp of the realities of the situation, to raise armies of millions of men, it is plain that he also would have experienced an inevitable shortage and delay in fulfilling contracts. He also would then have been attacked on this account as unfairly and as unscrupulously as was Lord Kitchener.

It has been placed on record that Lord Kitchener's prolonged residence abroad had rendered him unfamiliar with military conditions at home and that he had spent much time in occupying civilian posts, e.g. as Consul-General in

Egypt, before the war. But it may be said that if Lord Kitchener's residence abroad had put him out of touch with conditions at home, it had on the other hand given him a broadness of vision in striking contrast to other British soldiers. The man who had been Commander-in-Chief in South Africa and in India, who had been first Sirdar and then Consul-General in Egypt, and who had toured the Empire upon Imperial Defence had the inestimable advantage in that he viewed the Empire and the war as a whole. We never hear of Lord Kitchener as indulging in foolish talk as to "easternism" or "westernism." Moreover, there is ample evidence that Lord Kitchener had occupied the leisure of his avocations as a civilian in deep reflection upon military problems. How else can we explain it that this man who had no General Staff to aid him, who had no reports from Intelligence officers at his back, had reached conclusions as to the nature of a future European War so fundamentally sound? In this fact, that the crisis of his military career found him not a soldier but a civilian Lord Kitchener curiously recalls the great Americans, Lee, "Stonewall" Jackson, and Grant. The American Civil War found Lee living more or less the life of a country gentleman, Jackson was a Professor in a Cadet School, Grant was engaging, somewhat unsuccessfully, in business. Yet all three were men who made a permanent and lasting mark upon the annals of military history. Lee's brilliant campaigns are quoted in every text-book upon strategy, "Stonewall" Jackson has given rise to the most thrilling piece of military biography ever written, Grant was the Father of the War of Attrition School of which we heard so much during the war. It may be quoted as a curious coincidence, moreover, that Von Hindenburg, prominent among German generals who showed signs of real greatness

during the war, had been relegated to the retired list and was viewed with disfavour by the Kaiser and his entourage in the years before the war. A period of freedom from the narrowing routine of peace, of leisure for reading and for meditation, would not seem to be a disadvantage in the case of men called upon to shoulder immense responsibilities in times of great crisis, and to confront military problems of vast magnitude. Certainly, in his breadth of view, calm purpose and iron resolve, we find in Lord Kitchener a striking contrast to men such as French, Robertson and Wilson, who had been kept constantly on the active list and in military employment.

It has been said that Lord Kitchener was placed at a disadvantage in a Cabinet of politicians possessed of the gift of rapid and facile speech, that he was unequal to the wealth of lawyer-like eloquence of, for instance, Mr. Lloyd George. Yet we find Lord Kitchener, if habitually reticent in words, never at a loss for lucid and convincing speech when the occasion warranted it. Mr. Lloyd George on the only occasion upon which he crossed words with Kitchener face to face, retired in discomfiture from the encounter. Mr. Churchill has already been quoted upon Kitchener's speech to the new ministers of the Coalition Government. He tells us that the effect was similar to that often produced upon the House of Commons when a Government long raved at in the Press and on the platform is at last in a fully ranged debate permitted to expose its own case.

Mr. Churchill in comparing Lord Kitchener to the practised speakers of the House of Commons, to speakers of the calibre of Balfour or Lloyd George himself, is paying the War Minister, all unconsciously, no mean compliment. Elsewhere Mr. Churchill speaks of the "impressive and almost majestic manner" natural to Kitchener. If there

were no nice oratorical tricks, no deliberate attempts to play upon the gamut of popular passion, there was yet a cool reasoning, a deliberate balancing up of the pros and cons of a situation, and a sheer weight of intellectual power and personality, apt to be crushing to any opponent. We in no case find this more clearly displayed than in the semi-official interview which he gave to his critics from the House of Commons shortly before his death. Lord Esher, in general little disposed to give credit to Kitchener, writes: "One who was present, writing on the morning of the 6th of June, said that the *séance* went off really well, and that this opinion was gathered from many and some unfriendly sources." Surely it is difficult to think of a mind capable of meeting hostile criticisms, expressed sometimes in no measured phraseology, with lucid and convincing speech, capable not merely of silencing such criticisms, but of gaining the whole-hearted and enthusiastic support of his auditors, as "prostrated by the miasma of Downing Street"? When we consider the amount of work actually done by Lord Kitchener in those days, the millions of men whom he raised, the vast recruiting campaign which he inaugurated, the scheme of organization and expansion for the new armies which he drew up, asking neither aid nor counsel from another man; when we consider the immense magnitude and complexity of the problems which he solved and solved successfully, the firm lead which he gave to Government and People at the most critical period of the fortunes of our Empire; surely it could only be a very shallow and superficial critic who would venture to picture to us the man who did all these things as enfeebled by age and overborne by the sheer verbosity of his colleagues?

That the necessity of continually explaining the facts of the military situation to his civilian colleagues placed a



great burden upon the War Minister is no doubt true enough. Robertson's complaint about the War Cabinet may be noted in this connection: "They took up all his time discussing matters which were *his* job and then did not take his advice." But the broader and more tolerant mind of Lord Kitchener showed no trace of impatience when called upon to justify or to show reasons for his military policy in the council-chamber. It was a wise tolerance which brought about its own reward in a harmonious co-operation between the Civil Government and the Military Authorities to which the period following the death of Lord Kitchener formed an unhappy contrast. The spectacle of Mr. Lloyd George and Sir William Robertson engaging publicly in a sort of "pull-devil pull-baker" as to which was really going to carry on the war, cannot be paralleled by anything which occurred at the War Office or in the Cabinet, in the days of Lord Kitchener. But whilst we find the great War Minister never unwilling to meet his civilian colleagues in reasoned debate upon matters of broad military policy, and never unsuccessful in convincing them of the wisdom of the measures he had caused to be taken, we find him displaying a reticence with regard to facts of the military situation which he preferred to keep in his own hands, far in excess of that shown by other leading British soldiers either before or after. It was a reticence which many of his colleagues anxious to be "in the know" found irksome, and which gave rise to the passage at arms between Kitchener and Lloyd George already mentioned.

In this respect as in so many other phases in his character Lord Kitchener compares with the great American "Stone-wall" Jackson. The incident of some members of the Maryland Legislature, visiting Jackson at his post at Harper's Ferry, plying the general with numerous questions of a

military nature and getting unsatisfactory answers, may be paralleled with that of a distinguished civilian prefacing an inquiry respecting the movement of troops to Lord Kitchener by the remark, "I suppose there's no harm in my asking?"

"There's no harm in your *asking*," retorted Kitchener. We are told of Jackson that he was silent not only to those whose discretion he distrusted but on principle. Henderson quotes a letter to his wife.

"You say that your husband never writes you any news, I suppose you mean military news, for I have written you a great deal about your *sposo* and how much he loves you. What do you want with military news? Don't you know that it is unmilitary and unlike an officer to write news respecting one's post? You couldn't wish your husband to do an unofficerlike thing could you?"

Lord Kitchener, telling Mr. Lloyd George point-blank that there were certain details with regard to our military situation which he carried in his head and with which he trusted *no one*, may have been carrying reticence to excess, but if so it was a fault on the right side. Other leading British soldiers occupying responsible military posts would have done well to follow his example. What are we to think when we find men such as Sir Charles Monro, Sir Edmund Allenby, and Sir Stanley Maude writing long letters to Colonel Repington, which the latter quotes in his Diary, giving elaborate and detailed information as to the strength of our troops, and our military plans in India, Syria and Mesopotamia, information which would have been of priceless value to the enemy had it fallen into his hands, and which would have cost us the lives of thousands, conceivably hundreds of thousands of our troops? These indiscretions become the more glaring when we remember

that all these letters from the East and Near East went of course by sea, that the sea-route was made dangerous by German submarines, and that upon one occasion earlier in the war, an enemy submarine had stopped a transport and taken off three British officers and a mass of correspondence, which, couched in indiscreet language, and published in the German Press, had caused a good deal of unpleasantness to the British Government.<sup>1</sup>

“Stonewall” Jackson, characterizing it as unmilitary and unlike an officer to write news respecting one’s post, took a stern view of military tittle-tattle of this description, as stern a view as Lord Kitchener. And when we find distinguished British soldiers indulging in this sort of thing, the, at times, almost exaggerated reticence shown by the War Minister becomes pardonable enough. What guarantee could there be against thoughtless gossip conveying news to the enemy, when men occupying leading positions showed so little appreciation of the evil which might come from an unguarded word ?

Henderson writes of “Stonewall” Jackson : “It was with his generals and colonels that there was sometimes a lack of sympathy. Jackson’s secrecy was often irritating. Men who were over-sensitive thought it implied a want of confidence. Those who were overburdened with dignity objected to being treated like the private soldiers ; and those over-conscious of superior wisdom were injured because their advice was not asked.”<sup>2</sup> The incident is quoted of General Whiting in a towering passion : “Oh hang him ! he was polite enough. But he didn’t say one word about his plans. I finally asked him for orders, telling him what

<sup>1</sup> How many similar letters containing military information fell into the enemy’s hands and were never published, but used against us ?

<sup>2</sup> *Stonewall Jackson*, Vol. I, p. 439.

troops I had. He simply told me to go back to Staunton, and he would send me orders to-morrow. I haven't the slightest idea what they will be. I believe he has no more sense than my horse ! ”

Subsequently, the commander who said of “ Stonewall ” Jackson, “ I believe he has no more sense than my horse, ” was heard to express a very different view. But the incident may be compared with French, furious that Lord Kitchener had made his arrangements for French co-operation for the relief of Antwerp without consulting him, and had planned the undertaking as an independent enterprise. It may be compared moreover with Sir Charles Callwell's story of the reticence shown by Kitchener upon the vexed question of compulsory service in 1915 : “ When in the early Autumn of 1915, he told me off as a kind of bear-leader to a Cabinet Committee presided over by Lord Crewe. . . . I found him a little unapproachable . . . I was of course only supposed to assist in respect to information . . . but it would have been a help to know exactly what one's Chief desired and thought. ”

We subsequently learn from the same writer that Lord Kitchener was in 1915 looking forward already to 1917 and was not anxious to bring the question to a head. But Lord Kitchener's reticence in this as other matters of burning interest to his civilian colleagues unquestionably aroused a certain feeling of irritation among many of these. Yet on the whole his handling of a very strained and difficult situation must be regarded as eminently wise and statesmanlike. At a time of great nervous tension, of deep anxiety and care, we find that Lord Kitchener whilst habitually reticent in matters of detail, and whilst keeping the conduct of the war firmly in his own hands, carefully avoiding anything that might appear to be an unfair or undue

exaltation of the military prerogatives at the expense of the civilians, we find him displaying upon occasion a wise self-restraint and a kindly tact which did much to smooth over ruffled susceptibilities. He seems to have regarded some of his colleagues, as concerned military matters, very much as children and displayed infinite patience in explaining matters of military policy to them. Sir Charles Callwell writes, "Lord K. seemed quite incapable of taking his Cabinet colleagues so seriously as people of that sort take themselves. Indeed, but for the more prominent ones, he never could remember what their jobs were, nor even recollect their names. It put one in a cold perspiration to hear him remark: ". . . A fellow—I don't know his name, but he's got curly hair, said. . . ." It speaks volumes for Lord Kitchener's actual tact and wisdom that if his estimate of his civilian colleagues was in some cases secretly low, such feelings never crept into his manner or speech, that there was never the least trace of the "pack of ignorant politicians" frame of mind about him, such as did so much to embitter the relations between soldiers and civilians in the latter phases of the war.

It says much too for the real greatness of Lord Kitchener's character, for his eminently broad grasp of men and affairs, that we find him consistently laying down the principle of *team-work* between himself and his colleagues. "We are out to fight the Germans, not to fight one another," was a phrase constantly on his lips. He rendered services in the direction of bringing Unity into the direction of the War which have been seldom realized. He lent his whole effort, in those trying times, to bringing the Cabinet to work together harmoniously for the common good. He was chary of making criticisms, temperate and restrained in his speech, careful to avoid anything likely to exacerbate per-

sonalities. The incident of Kitchener drawing Fisher aside and persuading him to withdraw his resignation was not the only occasion upon which he intervened to smooth over differences of opinion among colleagues, honestly held, but which threatened to split the Cabinet and to interrupt the conduct of the war. In a general atmosphere of gossip and intrigue it has never been charged to him by his most bitter critic that he gave utterance to a single mean or ignoble thought, that he ever spoke of a colleague words which he would not have cared to repeat to that colleague's face, or that he had any personal "axe" to grind, or personal end to achieve. And this is saying very much indeed to anyone familiar with the submerged currents of English public life.

In his dealings with our Allies, Kitchener made much for Unity of Purpose and of Resolve. He was one of the few English statesmen perfectly at home with the French language. He spoke with an ease and fluency which, joined to his character and prestige, made a powerful effect upon the French statesmen and soldiers with whom he had so much to do. It has never been questioned but that he dominated the Allied Military Conferences to an extent never achieved subsequently by any British Military Member, and that in general he brought about a broad unity in the councils of the Allies conspicuously lacking at conferences held subsequent to his death.

Few people looking at the matter in broad perspective can doubt that Lord Kitchener was eminently wise in the reticence he displayed in matters of embittered public controversy. What incident can truly be conceived more thoroughly disgraceful and discreditable to all concerned than Mr. Lloyd George as Prime Minister visiting Sir Douglas Haig as principal Commander-in-Chief in the field, accusing the latter point-blank of inciting journalists to

write against the Government, and threatening a counter-offensive in the form of public and disparaging criticisms of the conduct of military operations by this commander? Mr. Churchill writing of Mr. Lloyd George's speech at the Mansion House of July 21st, 1911, at the time of the Agadir Crisis says: ". . . this view was hard upon Count Metternich. How could he know what Mr. Lloyd George was going to do? Until a few hours before, his colleagues did not know. Working with him in close association I did not know. No one knew. Until his mind was definitely made up he did not know himself." <sup>1</sup>

When we find Mr. Lloyd George, when subsequently called upon to actually enforce Conscription Acts in a drastic manner, indulging in talk of the Military Moloch before whom all were asked to keep silent and bow the knee, when we find him in the critical days before the great German offensive, speaking of butchers' boys driving cattle to the slaughter, a certain element of doubt creeps in as to whether we should actually have found Mr. Lloyd George publicly supporting the military authorities in what might have reasonably been taken as an unfair and extreme exercise of the military prerogative, in attempting to coerce the Civil Government on the question of conscription. Lord Kitchener was unquestionably wise to avoid anything of the nature of a public wrangle upon a question of such grave import. He was certainly wise in declining to wade in the muddy waters of political intrigue.

It would be taking a very narrow view of the rôle played by Lord Kitchener in the World-War, to say that he unquestionably performed services to his country of the very greatest import, services which no other man whom we can conceive of as occupying his post as Secretary of State for War could

<sup>1</sup> *World Crisis*, Vol. I, p. 53.

have rendered, and that where he *did* make a muddle of things he made no worse a muddle than was made by his successors under conditions which were infinitely more favourable. But in reality, when we consider the circumstances under which Lord Kitchener's efforts failed to achieve the highest measure of success, such as at Antwerp and the Dardanelles, the conditions were such as to practically rule out any chance of success, conditions such as, viewed dispassionately, render it extremely improbable that any other Secretary of State for War in his place would have been successful. Can we seriously imagine that Lord Haldane, with Sir Charles Douglas or Sir James Wolfe-Murray as C.I.G.S., would have been successful in relieving Antwerp or in achieving the passage of the Dardanelles? Can we, weighing up the characters of personages involved, seriously conceive of Mr. Winston Churchill as a more successful War Minister than Lord Kitchener, or of Mr. Lloyd George as shining in this rôle? Certainly a study of Mr. Churchill's own views, as depicted in *The World Crisis*, and a study of the campaigns in North Russia and Siberia, which he actually conducted, all of which ended disastrously, rather give us the impression that if the Dardanelles Expedition under Lord Kitchener, thanks to the failure of a subordinate commander at the critical moment, did not achieve its mission of forcing the Straits, we were at least fortunate in that the force was withdrawn successfully, and that the troops engaged subsequently fought victoriously in Salonica, Palestine, and, in some cases, on the West Front. Had Mr. Churchill been Secretary of State for War, the Dardanelles Expedition would most probably have ended in a second and greater Kut. Nor would it be at all a fair or just principle to lay down that a commander to be truly great must be invariably successful in all his undertakings, no matter what the diffi-



culties which he has to face. Grant made many attempts at Vicksburg before he finally seized it, and rent the Confederacy in twain. "Stonewall" Jackson, at Kernstown, Gaines Mill and Cedar Run, working with an improvised staff and hastily-raised troops, conspicuously failed to win great victories; Wellington's sieges of San Sebastian were among the most unfortunate episodes of his career. It has been given to no commander, however great, to command a career of unchequered victory. And there is no commander who has won great victories, of whom it can be said that he made *no* mistakes. It is a truism among soldiers that victory in war goes to the side which makes *fewest* mistakes. Napoleon said of himself that he had made so many mistakes that he had ceased to be ashamed of them. A study of the campaigns of Turenne, Marlborough, Napoleon, Wellington, the great leaders of the American Civil War, and Von Moltke, shows all these soldiers betrayed into occasional error of judgment amid the "fog of War"; displaying moments of vacillation and irresolution, weighing up pros and cons amid a doubtful and changing situation. They won great victories, but they were victorious, not because they made no mistakes, but because the mistakes made by their enemies were even more numerous and more serious. To assert of Lord Kitchener that in a war of unprecedented magnitude filled with problems of unprecedented complexity, he made no mistakes, would be absurd. But it may be said with absolute truth that the mistakes made by Lord Kitchener were nothing like so serious as the mistakes made by the enemy.

Whatever the faults made here and there in matters of detail, the fundamental soundness of Kitchener's strategy cannot be called into question. He gave to the war, on the side of the Allies, an initial impulse which alone made

victory possible ; whilst we find him consistently viewing the war as a whole, and refraining from empty phrases as to East or West, we find him firm upon one point—" that wars take unexpected courses, and we must now prepare for a long struggle. Such a conflict could not be ended on the sea or by sea-power alone. It could be ended only by great battles on the Continent." Whether these " great battles on the Continent " were to be fought in the east or west Lord Kitchener left it to the exigencies of the general military situation to decide. But, " We must be prepared to put armies of millions in the field, and to maintain them for several years." There is here a standpoint very different from that of the German General Staff dreaming of a swift march upon Paris which would repeat the triumphs of the first Moltke and smash France at a blow.

As Lord Kitchener had foreseen, the war took courses which no man could have anticipated. The collapse of Russia in 1917 exposed France in 1918, as in the Spring of 1916, to a German offensive upon an immense scale. Yet the initial impulse given by Lord Kitchener was so fundamentally sound and executed with such whole-hearted energy that it served to ward off a quite unexpected situation occurring two years after the great War Minister had gone to his death amid the icy waters of the North Sea. In 1918, as earlier in 1916, it was the Kitchener armies which stood between France and overwhelming irretrievable defeat. But for the Kitchener armies, America would never have had the chance to come into the war so far as great military operations were concerned. It is no disparagement of the heroic French armies to assert that had no Kitchener armies stood with them shoulder to shoulder to face the tempest of steel and fire and poisonous gases, and all the diabolical agencies of war, unforeseen and undreamt of in 1914, which

burst upon France in 1918, she must have succumbed to the hosts of the invaders.

If the strategy of Lord Kitchener was so fundamentally sound, if the results he wrought were of so vast a nature that they survived for years after his death, and finally decided the war victoriously for the Allies, surely it is needless criticism to dwell, to the extent which has been done, upon mistakes which he is alleged to have made? Even the sun has spots upon its surface. Lord Kitchener was called upon by the Government of his country at the fifty-ninth second of the eleventh hour to take over a War Office wholly disorganized and unprepared for War. Practically every able and experienced staff-officer was taken for the Expeditionary Force, practically every officer and man capable of playing a useful part in training new troops were rushed out of the country. He was called upon to assume the immense responsibility of guiding the military destinies of his country after having been held at arm's length for years from any part or share in discussions upon Imperial Defence. He succeeded to the work of an Imperial General Staff which would appear to have performed its duties in a very fragmentary fashion. The British Government, in its wisdom, had done its best in Time of Peace to ensure Military Disaster in time of War. And then they called upon Kitchener and said: "Make us an Army." The marvel is that Kitchener did it. He made them an army. He performed a labour like unto that of the Israelites, of making bricks without straw. Unlike the Israelites, he uttered no word of complaint about it. Yet if the taskmaster's whip was the only thanks and reward which the Israelites gleaned for their labour, there were no lack of lashes for Lord Kitchener. The poison of tongues, the venomous spite of discredited generals and of intriguing politicians have not scrupled to

heap obloquy and abuse upon the man who died in his country's service, and who may be said, more than any other man, soldier, sailor or civilian, to have laid firm hands upon the Helm of State, and to have guided the British Empire through the most terrific tempest in all its history.

Many there are who, even whilst they admire and appreciate the immense feat accomplished by Lord Kitchener in raising the new armies, believe that at the time when he went down with the *Hampshire* his work was practically done. The Empire had weathered the storm, and if the loss of the pilot was a most tragic happening which filled all hearts with deep sorrow and grief, yet for the sake of the future one might say from inmost heart, "Thank God his Work is done!" It is, however, the real tragedy not only of Lord Kitchener but of the British Empire that the great soldier died with his work only half done. The new armies had been raised, millions of trained and disciplined troops were waiting for their country's call. But the far-seeing intellect, the soldier-statesman whose broad vision and iron resolve should have given the impulse to victory had gone, and there was no one to take his place. Something has already been written of the loss sustained in the lack of Kitchener's guiding hand at the time of the Roumanian Campaign. Certainly when we look back at the wretched and unseemly squabbling between Mr. Lloyd George and his generals, the general atmosphere of pettiness and personal intrigue, which characterized the closing phases of the war, and which did so much to needlessly prolong the struggle and to bring disaster upon the British arms, the loss sustained by the British Empire in the death of Lord Kitchener becomes very apparent. Lord Kitchener was more than a very great soldier, he was a very great man. Like "Stonewall" Jackson, with whose character his own shows so many curious points of similarity, he was a man of

deep religious nature and of stern sense of duty. Of Kitchener no more than of Jackson could it be said that he made the least effort to attract popularity. Of Kitchener as of Jackson it may be said that both were men of very high ideals and who set a very high standard for men under their command. Jackson's sternness, his absence of outward show, his at times unsympathetic manner to his troops, the high demands he made upon them, made him at first an unpopular leader in the American armies. It was not until his men had noted that the ungainly professorial figure was as cool and imperturbable when guns were roaring and bullets were flying, as when upon an ordinary parade, that they began to have confidence in him, and it was not until much longer that the men learnt that a very human heart beat beneath the mask of outward sternness. Similarly, it was not until the Great War that Lord Kitchener became a truly popular figure in the public life of the British Empire. Respect and confidence the public had in unbounded measure, but love ? It needed the psychological moment of the Great War to make Kitchener's a name to conjure with among the common folk. But the British People having given their confidence, and having given their love, gave with no grudging measure. Lord Kitchener's immense prestige, his habitual broadness of outlook, and tolerance, represented a loss to the British Empire which even yet has not been fully recognized. Whatever might be said against him by his civilian colleagues, no one could suspect him of engaging in personal intrigue. His *bona fides* were beyond suspicion. His was an influence for good and effective team-work between soldiers and civilians. His habitual reticence lent a powerful force to any appeal which he made, his unquestioned loyalty made for a stable government carrying on a continuous and well-thought-out policy, his prestige with our Allies made for Unity in Military

Action. All these were assets which the British Empire could ill afford to lose, and the lack of which in the Spring of 1918 brought us within a narrow verge of irretrievable ruin. Neither Robertson nor Wilson nor a Lloyd George were capable, in these respects, of fulfilling the rôle of a Kitchener.

Of Lord Kitchener it may be said no man has ever achieved such great results with such limited means at his disposal or under circumstances of more infinite difficulty. Within fourteen months he raised unaided by any system of National Registration or of compulsory service, from the United Kingdom alone, 2,257,521 men, he expanded the production of shells twenty-sevenfold, the production of hand-grenades six *thousandfold*, the production of trench-mortars fiftyfold, the production of machine-guns more than twentyfold. All this he did in the face of a war which had shaken the economic life of the world to its foundations, the absence of anything in the nature of cool and scientific preparation for war, or of any existing framework for raising and equipping armies upon a great scale.

Of Lord Kitchener it may be said, moreover, that no man has shouldered more vast responsibilities at a more critical period, that no man, soldier, civilian or sailor, has wrought more mightily upon the destinies of mankind, and that no man has had to face during his life and after his death criticism in general so ill-informed or so marked by personal feeling. Some explanation of this may be found in the very grandeur of his achievements. They loom upon us like some gigantic Cathedral, the true proportions of which become blurred and confused when we are close at hand, and which only become clear to us when we step back and view them from afar.

So with the rôle played by Kitchener in the World-War.

To his colleagues and contemporaries, overwhelmed in the rapid march of great events, overshadowed by the hopes and anguish and sufferings of those days, the trivial seemed often more important than the things which really mattered. Even to the very day upon which Lord Kitchener died, it was hoped very generally that 1916 would see the end of the War. Personal feeling in many cases blurred the sense of perspective. Civilians ignorant of the vast technical problems involved in suddenly raising great armies, and little disposed to admit the responsibility of Civilian Governments for having omitted necessary measures of preparation for War, were prone to wax impatient and condemnatory at the various shortcomings in the military machinery brought to their notice ; soldiers narrow in their outlook, wounded in their amour-propre were only too ready to bring forward hasty and ill-considered charges against their chief. It is necessary to view Kitchener's achievements against the background of the War as a whole for all these things to dwindle down into their just proportions, to realize the genius of the soldier-statesman flaming like some blaze of lightning across the black thunder-clouds of war ; to recognize the greatness of his soul.

But the farther we step back from the canvas the more impressive must the figure of Kitchener appear in that long and bloodstained drama in which the Armed Fates battled for the Soul of Mankind. He comes into vision a figure clad in no shining armour, a careworn face and shabby blue uniform, nothing heroic about it to outward seeming, nothing to tempt comparison with German War Gods brandishing Mailed Fists. But there was that about that careworn face and shabby blue uniform which set a great and peaceful Empire into one vast camp of armed men ; which set the drums of the British Empire, following the sun in its

course as they sounded *réveille* from one end of the world to the other, beating a furious tocsin of War, a tocsin of War which aroused as vehement an answer. There was nothing of Glory in the quiet speech of that figure in its shabby blue uniform. It spoke not of love of conquest nor of material pomp and power. No nice phrases anent "Homes for Heroes" were on its lips. It spake not of reward. It said: "Come, free men, come." And from all over the wide British Empire, from India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, from burning plains and snowy mountains, from populous cities and lonely farms, in their millions, the free men came.

It has been said of Sir John Moore that when wounded to death at Corunna the last words on his lips were: "I hope my country will do me justice." Lord Kitchener went to his death amid circumstances even more tragic than those of Sir John Moore, but it is doubtful whether England has done full justice to the memory of one of the very greatest, if not the greatest of her sons. What are we to think when we find an English man of letters writing of him in these terms: "His biographer seems to be unaware of or unwilling to disclose any deep attachment to a woman. This reticence leaves incomplete the story of his life or betrays a flaw in his nature."<sup>1</sup> We scarcely know which to marvel at most; the triviality of the phrase as applied to a man who played so vast a rôle in so grim a drama, or the smug self-complacency of the author. Certainly nothing has ever been penned more illustrative of a trivial mind setting itself in judgment over a great one.

Southey writes of the death of Nelson: "It is almost superfluous to add that all the honours which a grateful country could bestow were heaped upon the memory of

<sup>1</sup> Lord Esher, *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 217.



Nelson. His brother was made an earl, with a grant of £6000 per year ; £10,000 were voted to each of his sisters ; and £100,000 for the purchase of an estate." He writes further : "The death of Nelson was felt in England as something more than a public calamity ; men started at the intelligence, and turned pale as if they had heard of the loss of a dear friend."

The Death of Lord Kitchener was felt all over the British Empire as a shattering blow and as the loss of a dear friend, yet surely it must be taken as some littleness entering into the fibre of the English race that no fitting public monument has been yet erected to one of the very greatest of Englishmen. The Nelson Monument may have all the artistic faults alleged by latter-day purists. But it stands there as a concrete symbol of the love and gratitude of the English People to a very great Captain who died in Battle in his country's service. Lord Kitchener, as in the case of Lord Nelson, died in Battle in his country's service, and if there was no glow of glory in his death, no thrill of victory as at Trafalgar, yet of him also it may be written : "So perfectly, indeed, had he performed his part that . . . the fleets of the enemy were not merely defeated, but destroyed ; new navies must be built, and a new race of seamen reared for them. . . ." To Lord Kitchener more than to any other Englishman of his time must be attributed the credit of having shattered for good and all, the German dream of Empire upon the Seas. To him belongs the merit of having foreseen that, "such a conflict could not be decided on the sea or by sea-power alone," that the hammer-like blows of great battles fought by huge armies upon the Continent, would be required to root up German sea-power from the very soil from which it grew. The Navy was able to safeguard the British Isles from invasion, it was able to safeguard the passage of our

armies and incidentally to inflict a good deal of suffering upon the enemy by means of the Blockade. But there its powers ended. It could not force the German Fleet to leave the shelter of its mine-fields and fortifications to engage in an unequal fight. The surrender of the German Fleet, the complete and utter destruction of German power upon the seas, cannot be considered as wholly—or even mainly due to the British Fleet. It was the Kitchener Armies which turned the Balance of Military Power in Europe, and which finally left Germany prostrate under the Heel of Her Enemies; it was the Kitchener Armies which dealt the forceful blows which sickened Germany of the War and led to the surrender at Scapa Flow.

When the victory was won, when the World thrilled to the Intoxication of Armistice Week, and the Mighty Ones gathered at Versailles to negotiate a Peace which for sheer Political Unwisdom, sheer callous disregard of those higher principles for which hundreds of thousands of the men of our race had laid down their lives, has scarcely been paralleled, we find Mr. Lloyd George as Prime Minister of England distributing Honours and Rewards with no grudging hand. Journalists, War-Profiters, and the like, were throned in the English House of Lords which proceeded like Charity to embrace a multitude of sins. But it occurred to no one at those gatherings of Pomp and Power where the Great Ones of English Political Life assembled to the Slogan of “Alone I did it. *I won the War!*” to pay the tribute of a passing tear to the memory of the Dead Soldier, it occurred to no one to speak of Lord Kitchener, to suggest some fitting public monument to the memory of the man whose Strength and Genius, whose Foresight and Resolve, had preserved the British Empire from destruction.

Yet amid the ingratitude and self-seeking of politicians

we may console ourselves in the words of an American Poet :

“ What does it matter where his body fall,  
What does it matter where they build the tomb,  
Five million men from Calais to Khartoum,  
These are his wreath and memorial.”

The steel-grey skies and leaden waters of the northern sea are a worthy setting to the tragedy which ended the life of the greatest soldier whom a sea-empire has ever produced, the harsh call of the sea-gull, the ceaseless lapping of the icy waves are an endless requiem, singing Glory to the Soul of the Illustrious Dead.









## APPENDIX I

### LUDENDORFF ON THE DEATH OF KITCHENER

#### THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL

AN interesting letter received by the author from General von Ludendorff, and reproduced here in facsimile, runs as follows :

“ In similar fashion as in the history of the Emperor William I, apart from Bismarck and Moltke, the name of the Prussian Minister of War, and great army organizer, Von Roon, but for whom the three victorious wars of that epoch would have been inconceivable, has been too little mentioned, so it appears to me, that in the history of the world-war Lord Kitchener has not yet received the appreciation due to him if we are to perceive the great historical events in clear perspective.

“ Lord Kitchener became the organizer of the British Army after England had entered the world-war. He created armies out of next to nothing, trained and equipped them. Through his genius alone, England developed side by side with France, into an opponent capable of meeting Germany on even terms (*vollmächtiger Gegner für Deutschland*) whereby the position on the front in France in 1915 was so seriously changed to Germany's disadvantage.

“ His great organizing powers alone would have sufficed to render Lord Kitchener one of the most remarkable and



important of the military personalities of the world-war, perhaps the most distinguished England has ever had.

*“His mysterious death was the work neither of a German mine nor of a German torpedo but of that power which would not permit the Russian army to recover with the help of Lord Kitchener because the destruction of Zarist Russia had been determined upon. Lord Kitchener’s death was caused by his abilities.”*<sup>1</sup>

“ (Signed) LUDENDORFF.”

I have italicized the concluding passage of this remarkable letter because deep as will be the interest with which Englishmen will read the words of soldierly acknowledgment of Lord Kitchener’s great military capacities which come from the enemy-leader, the phrase, *Lord Kitchener’s death was due to his abilities*, must acquire a tragic significance when we remember the dark stories which have so long been circulating, alleging that this greatest of Englishmen met his death by treachery. Courtesy towards a distinguished enemy general, who has gone as far probably as he *could* go, in unravelling the mystery of the *Hampshire*, must forbid us from dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s of his statement too narrowly. But Englishmen who remember the uncommonly close relationship which existed in those days between the Russian revolutionary committees and the German intelligence service, may be forgiven for drawing their own conclusions.

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

## APPENDIX II

### THE BRITISH ARMY IN 1914

THE declaration of war (August 4th, 1914) found the British Army with 84 regular battalions serving at home, 17 regiments of cavalry, 14 batteries of Horse-Artillery, 99 field batteries, 43 companies of garrison-artillery, 63 companies of engineers, besides departmental services and depots. There were besides these, 101 battalions of Special Reservists, 2 Irish Yeomanry regiments, which were nominally grouped with the Special Reserve, and there were Special Reserve units of engineers and garrison artillery. Special Reserve "field-artillery" were drafted into the ammunition columns of regular field batteries. Of the regular troops serving abroad, the bulk were in India, comprising 9 cavalry regiments, 11 horse batteries, 45 field batteries, 8 mountain batteries, 6 heavy batteries, 21 companies of garrison artillery, and 52 battalions of infantry. There were 5 regiments of cavalry, 3 horse batteries, 1 mountain battery, 6 field batteries, 35 companies of garrison artillery, and 21 battalions of infantry distributed in the Mediterranean Command (Gibraltar, Malta and Egypt), in South Africa, and in one or two other colonial garrisons. Troops abroad were held practically upon a war-footing even in time of peace. Troops at home were upon a slightly reduced establishment, battalions having an *establishment* of 800 men, which, however,

was never actually reached. Moreover, as said, the home battalions contained a quite unduly large number of "young" soldiers. The cavalry and artillery were somewhat better off, but the latter arm also required a higher proportion of reservists for mobilization purposes than the continental armies.

The Territorial Force consisted of 36 regiments of cavalry (Imperial Yeomanry), 14 horse batteries, 57 "brigades" (a brigade had 3 batteries) of field artillery, 14 heavy batteries, 89 companies of garrison artillery, 103 companies of engineers, a railway battalion, 194 battalions of infantry, 13 cyclist battalions, and some departmental troops. This force was not merely far below establishment at the outbreak of the war, but was practically untrained. Recruits were supposed to do a course of 40 drills of one hour each, i.e. the equivalent of at most 10 half-days. This was to be followed by a minimum of 10 drills per annum of one hour each, and an annual course of field-training for from 8 to 15 days. Recruits for the force were not required to undergo a medical examination. Of a nominal 251,706 borne on the lists of the Territorial Force at the outbreak of the war, there were 100,000 who had not qualified in musketry, even at the limited standard required from the force, whilst only 168,000 put in the requisite 15 days' training. The Territorial Force was lacking in waggons, harness, entrenching tools and other equipment.

The establishment of the British Regular Army at home upon August 4th, 1914, provided for 136,726 troops, of whom 124,913 may be said to be combatants. The strength actually present with the colours was 126,309, of whom 114,580 were combatants. The Army Reserve was estimated at 145,347, of whom 135,124 joined the colours in August, and 3500 in September—a total of 138,624. A percentage

of roughly 10 per cent. of these belonged to non-combatant services. The Special Reserve had an establishment of 80,120. In August 58,993 joined the colours, and 2016 joined up in September, a total of 61,009. About 10 per cent. of these were also non-combatants. The totals of regular troops, Army Reservists, and Special Reservists thus actually available at the outbreak of the war for combatant purposes may be taken as approximately 291,192. Deducting 170,000 men, the estimated strength of the Expeditionary Force, there would remain in the depots 121,192 men, of whom about half were Special Reservists who had received at least six months' training. The remainder were "young" soldiers. It is plain that had there existed a properly thought out scheme for expansion, 10,000 selected men might well have been spared to form *cadres* for new units.

A serious deficiency of the army was in the shortage of officers. Even the regular army suffered from this shortage. Owing to lack of candidates, young men had been accepted into cavalry regiments upon "probation," but without having undergone any sort of training. Instead of there being any real competitive examination for Sandhurst, the authorities had to be glad to take any material which offered itself. Military service had become unpopular with the class which had hitherto provided the bulk of the regular officers, and in the period just before the war the number of candidates for commissions was less than the number of vacancies. The Special Reserve was upwards of 1000 officers short of its infantry establishment. The Territorial Force had a shortage of twice as many. In view of this shortage, lists of retired officers willing to come forward in time of war might well have been drawn up, and a proportion of suitable N.C.O.'s earmarked for promotion.

So far as concerned the training and equipment of the

Expeditionary Force, this left little to be desired. In fact it may be said that in many respects the British Expeditionary Force was the *only* army in Europe which went into the war with a modern equipment. The South African War had taught the British Army the value of good shooting. British methods of musketry training were very distinctly superior to the methods favoured in the French and German armies. The web equipment, moreover, superseding a clumsy arrangement of leathern belts, bandoliers and pouches, was eminently practical and sane. The short Lee-Enfield rifle was, as a practical weapon of war, markedly superior to the German Mauser or to the French Lebel. The British cavalry was better mounted than the German, and was practically the only cavalry force in Europe which had scientifically studied the combination of mounted with dismounted tactics.<sup>1</sup> It was armed with a rifle identical with that of the infantry, and in time of peace cavalry regiments had headed the lists for good shooting. The horse-artillery, armed with a 13-pounder, quick-firing gun, was a magnificent fighting force, superbly horsed, and manned by picked men from the field-artillery. The latter, so far as concerned field and howitzer batteries, was certainly equal to the French, the superiority of whom has been admitted by the German Crown Prince in his memoirs. The British 18-pounder field-gun and 4.5" field howitzer were almost the only guns which sustained no important alteration in design all through the war.

A very serious defect in organization and training as compared with the usages in continental armies, was the distribution of machine-guns among battalions, instead of their being organized in special sections. This led to machine-

<sup>1</sup> Bernhardt's recommendations down to the very outbreak of the war remained virtually a dead letter in the German army.

guns being dribbled away in action instead of being concentrated to secure definite tactical advantages. This defect in the British Army is the more remarkable in that we had had special opportunities of realizing the value of machine-guns in South Africa and in the Soudan. The faulty use of machine-guns on our side led to a general impression that the Germans were superior to us in the numbers of these weapons. This impression was not accurate.

Another very important deficiency was the lack of provision of high-explosive shell and heavy guns. Sir John French (afterwards Lord French), as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had failed completely to foresee not merely the scope of the war for which we were in those days preparing, but the immense importance of the heavy gun and high-explosive shell. Nor had the other distinguished staff officers associated with him, Sir Charles Douglas, Sir Henry Wilson or Sir James Wolfe-Murray, shown greater prevision. The French army, whilst it realized the value of the high-explosive shell, was also deficient in heavy artillery, a model of 1878 being practically the only gun available heavier than the "75." The Germans in this respect, as in also their more scientific use of machine-guns, entered the war with a distinct advantage.

In summing up the tactics and equipment of the three armies which played the principal part on the West Front, one may say :

The British infantry was markedly superior in training, tactics and equipment to either the French or the German.

The British cavalry was equally superior to either French or German.

The British horse-artillery was unrivalled in any other army.

The British and French field-artillery was superior to the German.

The German heavy artillery and machine-gun tactics were markedly superior to British or French.

Apart from regular troops serving at home, army reserve, Special Reserve, and Territorials, the British Imperial forces possessed certain powers of expansion from India, and from the great self-governing colonies.

In India, besides European troops, there existed a native army comprising :

40 regiments of cavalry,  
12 mountain batteries,  
19 companies of sappers and miners,  
140 battalions of infantry.

The establishment was 2751 officers and 161,085 of other ranks, with 35,700 reservists.

There were, further, volunteer forces made up of Europeans and Eurasians, with an establishment of 1524 officers and 37,382 of other ranks, plus 3093 reservists. These were organized into units of cavalry, artillery, engineers and artillery, besides infantry. During the war they provided a valuable reservoir for drafts and officers for newly-raised formations. Besides these, there should be mentioned the Imperial Service troops, 20,000 strong, raised and maintained by native princes under supervision of British officers.

Previous to the war, it had been the custom to write off the British regular troops employed in India, as practically unavailable for a European war. It was a remarkable display of sagacity and wisdom on the part of Lord Kitchener that at the very outset of the war he proceeded to recall the whole of the white regular troops from India except 8 battalions. He laid it down as a principle, however, that for every

British unit withdrawn from that great dependency two native units should be withdrawn likewise, so that the proportion of British to native troops should remain undisturbed. Although the troops thus withdrawn were subsequently replaced by two divisions of Territorials, Lord Kitchener would scarcely have ventured to adopt such far-reaching measures but for the existence in India herself of a body of trained and disciplined volunteers. As Commander-in-Chief in India as far back as 1904 he had devoted special attention to encouraging and improving the local European volunteer formations, an attitude in marked contrast to that of many of his predecessors. Addressing the Calcutta Volunteers he once said: "I hold that in India every Englishman by birth or descent owes it as a duty to his country to become an efficient volunteer . . . my remarks apply not only to Calcutta, for in all India I notice with deep regret that not half of those who ought to be Volunteers are sufficiently patriotic to belong to the Volunteer organizations." <sup>1</sup>

Parallel with his encouragement of the Volunteer movement, Lord Kitchener had instituted those sweeping reforms which did so much to render the Indian army an efficient instrument of war. The result was that when the crisis came, India was able to contribute four British regular divisions, besides two infantry divisions, and two of cavalry, Indian troops, sent direct to France, one division to the Persian Gulf, and the equivalent of the infantry of two divisions to Egypt. Ultimately, as is known, India undertook the main share in the conquest of Mesopotamia and Syria.

The Dominion of Canada maintained a very considerable force of militia previous to the war. This consisted of a small number of permanently embodied units, virtually

<sup>1</sup> *Pioneer Mail*, March 25th, 1904.



regulars. These units, however, also acted as schools for the training of officers and N.C.O.'s for the "non-permanent" force. The non-permanent militia comprised :

- 27 regiments of cavalry,
- 26 field-batteries,
- 6 regiments of garrison-artillery (including 13 heavy batteries),
- 5 companies of engineers,
- 106 battalions of infantry.

The extent to which Canada, Australia, New Zealand and, so far as her more limited resources allowed, South Africa, took part in the war was one of its greatest surprises.

Canada, with a peace strength of 3000 men permanent force, and 60,000 non-permanent, enlisted a grand total of 628,964 men, of whom 399,807 were sent to France.

Australia had in 1911 introduced a defence scheme based upon Lord Kitchener's recommendations. This accepted the principle of compulsory service. There were in 1914, 2662 men permanent force, and 31,282 non-permanent, besides 49,564 members of rifle clubs, and 88,708 senior cadets undergoing training under the Defence Act.

During the war Australia raised 412,953 men, of whom 331,781 served in France, and in other theatres of the war.

New Zealand, like Australia, had accepted the principle of compulsory service. Her peace establishments provided for a force of 30,000 partially-trained troops. During the war she raised 128,505 men, of whom 117,175 served in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

South Africa raised 136,070 men, who served mostly against the German colonies.

Other colonies raised 134,837.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand raised between them

1,170,442 men, a figure which not even the wildest enthusiast for Imperial unity would have dreamt of, before the war. India raised even greater numbers—1,440,437.

Gratifying as these amazing figures are, they yet shed some light upon the immense difficulties of an Imperial mobilization. It was never possible for the British Empire to collect even one-half of the magnificent Canadian and Australasian troops together for a decisive stroke at the decisive moment. The contingents came dribbling in, full of patriotism and full of fight, the flower of a magnificent manhood, but lacking in training for a European war. Thanks to the efforts of the Committee of Imperial Defence, a certain general approximation in organization and equipment had been achieved all over the Empire. Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand battalions, brigades and divisions accepted the British establishments. Moreover, the armies of the Dominions had been trained largely under the auspices of British staff officers, usually the pick of their profession, which led to a certain general uniformity in training and outlook. All, however, suffered from being almost untrained in time of peace, whilst it was long ere the real scope and immensity of the struggle were realized by the young democratic governments.

## APPENDIX III

### KITCHENER UPON THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF SURPRISE IN ATTACK

IN his instructions to Sir Ian Hamilton in July 1915 Kitchener expresses himself even more emphatically upon the importance of surprise in attack than in the message to Dallas quoted in the text. These instructions run :

“ Lord Kitchener told me to tell you he had no wish to interfere with the man on the spot, but from closely watching our actions here, as well as those of General French in Flanders, he is certain that the only way to make a real success of an attack is by surprise. Also, that when the surprise ceases to be operative, in so far that the advance is checked and the enemy begin to collect from all sides to oppose the attackers, then, perseverance becomes merely a useless waste of life. In every attack there seems to be a moment when success is in the assailant’s grasp. Both the French and ourselves at Arras and Neuve Chapelle lost the opportunity.”<sup>1</sup>

Lord Kitchener’s immense foresight in recognizing at once the magnitude of the conflict in which we were involved, and the vast energy with which he set himself to the task of organizing and creating the New Armies, have been very generally realized, but it is less commonly appreciated that he was, from the purely tactical standpoint, as far in advance

<sup>1</sup> *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol. II, pp. 1-2.

of his contemporaries in 1915 as when in 1914 he predicted a prolonged war. It was not until they had passed through the ordeal of their Verdun offensive that the German leaders came to recognize the truth of the doctrine laid down by Kitchener in 1915: ". . . that when the surprise ceases to be operative, in so far that the advance is checked and the enemy begin to collect from all sides to oppose the attackers, then, perseverance becomes merely a useless waste of life." It required two more years of prolonged and bloody warfare, during which they sacrificed hundreds of thousands of lives and thousands of millions of pounds, to knock into the heads of British leaders, such as Robertson and Haig, the fundamental truth which Kitchener had recognized as far back as 1915, viz., that the assailant who fails to surprise his enemy throws away the most potent weapon in the armoury of the attack, and, where the armies are at all evenly balanced in strength, *moral*, and equipment, condemns himself to a mere useless waste of life. What would have been Kitchener's verdict upon the battles of the Somme and in Flanders?

In view of the legend so industriously circulated that the failure of the offensive at Neuve Chapelle was due to "lack of an unlimited supply of high-explosive shell" it is interesting and instructive to note Kitchener's opinion that the failure in this battle was due not to shortages of munitions but to faulty leadership. When we recall that the Battle of Loos resulted in a similar fiasco, which cannot be excused on the ground of munitions shortages, and when we recall that Haig, following substantially the same system as French, conspicuously failed to win great and sweeping tactical successes, even when possessed of a vast and overwhelming superiority, we may reasonably accept Kitchener's judgment, on this particular matter, as well-founded.

After Verdun the German General Staff must be given the credit of having learnt their lesson. They never tried this particular form of attack again. Ludendorff, preparing his offensive in 1918, took drastic measures to ensure secrecy and surprise. To quote once more from Tuohy: “. . . as we learnt from a captured order signed by him [Ludendorff] . . . ‘all unite, Operations, Intelligence, Signals, Adjutant-General’s Branch, Quartermaster-General—and see to it that you shall not move a cart or register a battery or speak a word over the telephone if such should convey information to the enemy as to our intentions. I shall appoint special officers to report to me direct as to how the various branches of the service are concealing their daily preparations or omitting to do so.’”

After their great and successful strokes against the British in March and the French in May, we find the Germans in 1918 definitely accepting the principle laid down by Kitchener in 1915, viz., that after the surprise had ceased to be operative, the enemy’s resistance had thickened, and the advance was checked, it was a mere useless waste of life to persevere in the attack. We find them breaking off their offensives when these had reached this stage, and endeavouring to conserve their strength for a great and supreme effort. Similarly we see Foch in the final phase of the war dealing a succession of rapid and smashing blows, perpetually surprising the enemy and pinning down his reserves, and keeping the initiative in his own hands.

If it be asked why the British Imperial General Staff for so long persisted in a method of warfare which Lord Kitchener, greatest of British soldiers, had recognized early in 1915 to be barren and profitless of any real result, the answer is surely to be found in the tragic death of the great War-Minister, and the absence of any truly outstanding military personality

among his successors. Lord Kitchener was capable of hammering his New Armies into the Sword of a Giant in the fiery furnace of war, but he could not bequeath to men such as Robertson, Wilson or Haig, his own Giant's strength, to wield it. Disastrous as was the Moltke tradition of envelopment to the German army, the tradition of "wearing out" taken by the British Army from Grant, came within an ace of being still more disastrous to ourselves. Grant's phrase, *War of Attrition*, no doubt expresses a great and fundamental truth as applied to warfare between a strong power and a weak one. Yet we note an immense difference in the actual practice of this doctrine between the Northern leader in 1864 and the British leaders in 1916-17, there is in fact the difference between an original genius and a mere imitator. The annals of military history surely afford no more thrilling and instructive a drama than the tremendous duel fought by Lee and Grant in Virginia, but there is perhaps no campaign about which there exists more popular misconception. Grant, after his first passage at arms with Lee, in The Wilderness (May 5th and 6th, 1864), a battle brought about by an offensive from *Lee* and not from Grant, speedily renounced any idea of wearing down his enemy by sheer fighting-power. In the words of Captain Vaughan-Sawyer: "Grant recoiled from the completion of his task in the Wilderness and sought to gain by manœuvring what he had set out to gain by fighting."<sup>1</sup> In successive battles, Spottsylvania, May 14th, North Anna, May 24th, and Cold Harbour, June 2nd-3rd, we find Grant reaching to a flank and endeavouring to outmanœuvre and surprise Lee. Pitted against a consummate master in artifice and manœuvre, these were efforts which were successively foiled, but this does not alter the fact that Grant had thrown his theories of

<sup>1</sup> *Grant's Campaign in Virginia*, p. 65.

“attrition” completely overboard. Captain Vaughan-Sawyer writes of the battle of Cold Harbour: “Before ordering his frontal attack . . . Grant was much exercised in mind as to whether it would be justified after the experience of the Wilderness and Spottsylvania, for the strength of the Confederate positions promised very heavy losses . . . Grant stated that this was the only action he ever regretted having fought.” Grant at Cold Harbour was possessed of a superiority in numbers and material over his opponent even exceeding that which the Allies in 1916-17 possessed over the Germans on the West Front, the Northern States in 1864 possessed a general superiority over the Southern Confederacy even exceeding that which the Entente Powers possessed over Germany and her Allies. But we do not find Grant coining specious theories as to “wearing out” and “killing confeds.,” to explain away minor successes purchased by tremendous casualty lists, we find him writing that Cold Harbour “was the only action he ever regretted having fought.” Finally we find him recoiling from Cold Harbour, once more endeavouring to outmanœuvre his great adversary, and coming within an ace of doing this at Petersburg, June 15th. Ultimately the result of these continuous flanking movements was that Lee’s thin lines were stretched until they broke, which brought about the collapse of the Confederacy.

The essential point in all this is that we find Grant, grim, hard-hitting, ruthless fighter though he was, in a succession of terrific battles adopting substantially the same standpoint as that laid down by Lord Kitchener in 1915, viz., that where the surprise of the enemy ceases to be operative persistence in attack is mere waste of life.

No doubt this is a doctrine which only applies to armies fairly well balanced in regard to *moral* training and equipment. But it is a doctrine which certainly applied to the

armies on the Western Front in 1916-17 as to the Northern and Southern armies in Virginia in 1864. We see Grant successively breaking off offensives after he had failed to surprise the enemy, and we have already observed the practice followed by Ludendorff and Foch in 1918. It is the measure of the loss sustained by the British Empire in the Death of Lord Kitchener that his successors failed to recognize this principle and that they persisted for two long years in carrying on a system of warfare foredoomed to defeat. From the opening of the Somme offensive, July 1st, 1916, to the period in which the British armies, exhausted and well-nigh exterminated by years of bloody and hopeless sacrifice, reeling back from a succession of disastrous defeats, passed under the orders of a French Commander-in-Chief, we find Germany, the Continental Power, waging war in the spirit of a World-Empire, whereas Great Britain, the World-Empire, waged war in the spirit of a Continental Power. Lord Kitchener summed the matter up with his customary terseness when he said: "French and his Staff believe firmly that the British Imperial Armies can pitch their camp down in one corner of Europe and there fight a world-war to a finish. The thing is absurd."<sup>1</sup> Chief of Staff to Lord French at that time was Sir William Robertson, who subsequently became Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and after Lord Kitchener's death, assumed the responsibility for the general direction of the military resources of the British Empire. Sufficient has been written in the text as to how he acquitted himself in the face of the new responsibilities thrust upon him. Had Lord Kitchener lived there can be no possible doubt but that he would never have tolerated the Somme offensive and that he would have followed Grant's policy of stretching the enemy's lines

<sup>1</sup> *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol. I, p. 4.



until they broke, had it appeared impossible to secure a great tactical surprise in the West. It is a truism to say that a chain is only strongest at its weakest link. Vienna and Budapest were points about which the Germans were no less sensitive than the British were sensitive about Paris. The Western Allies in 1916 enjoyed in any case a superiority of seven to four as compared with the Germans. If unable to secure a break-through themselves, they had at least no reason to fear an enemy offensive. Kitchener's policy would undoubtedly have been to use the West Front as pivot of manœuvre and to force the Germans to fight him upon his own terms.

The war may be said from the military standpoint to have produced three figures which were supremely great, Foch, Ludendorff and Kitchener, and of these three it is no mere patriotic prejudice which leads an English writer to consider Kitchener to have been the greatest. The outbreak of the war found both Foch and Ludendorff guilty of profound and fundamental misconceptions. Foch was a firm believer in the Russian "Steam-Roller," Ludendorff was dreaming of a march on Paris. Neither had a just vision of the immensity of the struggle upon which they had embarked. Moreover, in the case both of Foch and Ludendorff, they were soldiers trained in the atmosphere of great Continental armies, men who succeeded to the control of military systems which had been prepared for generations for the ordeal before them. If Germany had passed forty years in keying up her armaments for a second and greater conflict with France, the latter country had had a period of preparation which was not shorter. Sedan was a stigma which France burned to wipe away. Marshal Foch was a soldier of rapier-like genius, brilliant and daring alike in attack and defence. But if he had had to improvise his

army as well as to lead it in attack, what sort of chance would he ever have got of displaying his full genius? The same thing applies to Ludendorff. Both were free to devote their whole energy to the conduct of military executive operations. Lord Kitchener in comparison with men such as these was like a man fighting with one hand tied behind his back. And yet even so there is ample evidence that he saw into the realities of the military situation with profounder insight and clearer vision than either of his two great contemporaries, that he was as far in advance in his appreciation of the military executive problems, as he was in matters relating to the general conduct and duration of the war.

“Give him my affectionate regards,” said Lee to an aide-de-camp, when he heard of Jackson’s wound at Chancellorsville, “tell him to make haste and get well, and come back to me as soon as he can. He has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right.”

The report that “Stonewall Jackson” had lost his left arm proved to be less than the truth. The great American had been mortally wounded. Yet Lee’s phrase happily expresses the loss to the British Army in Lord Kitchener’s Death. The Empire had lost its right arm. The difference between a supreme genius such as Kitchener and an “able” soldier such as Robertson, Wilson or Haig, is that the one is the *master* of his technique whereas the other is its slave. The Art of War may be likened in many respects to the Art of Music. In both cases we have an elaborate and complicated technique without a profound knowledge of which the greatest genius can produce but discordant and jarring chords. A Lloyd George or an Abraham Lincoln can no more conduct military campaigns without a profound knowledge of the technique of war than a man of genius can play one of Beethoven’s Sonatas without a technical know-

ledge of music. Yet, in like manner, the difference between an "able" musician and musician of genius is that the one is limited by his technique whereas the other soars far beyond. Wagner revolutionizing the established technique of music, producing operas which at first were hissed off the stage, may be compared with Kitchener revolutionizing the established technique of warfare by creating his New Armies, amid the jeers and laughter of "able" soldiers whose horizons were limited by the technical ideas of their class. Many people have come forward to assert that Kitchener was no organizer and knew nothing of military methods because he rode roughshod over established conventional usages. As wise to assert that Wagner knew nothing of music because he rode roughshod over established forms! The man of genius is inevitably unorthodox in his methods for the simple reason that he is in advance of his time, head and shoulders above his contemporaries, and these are bound to find fault with methods which they do not understand. Robertson, Wilson and Haig were all able men deeply versed in the technical lore of their profession. And we find them writing to Kitchener that they did not want the New Armies and would be satisfied if the Old Army and Territorials were kept up to strength! And again, after Kitchener's death, we find Robertson strictly orthodox in his methods, a faithful servant to his technique. The result was that he made the most ghastly muddle conceivable of the Roumanian Campaign, threw away hundreds of thousands of lives on the Somme and in Flanders, became involved in a squalid and sordid dispute with the Civil Government, and ended his career ingloriously by being dismissed. It was the same thing as if Wagner had died leaving his greatest opera unfinished and a musician of conventional ability had been called in to write the ending!

Of the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who flocked to Kitchener's call there were few who saw their homes again. In the true sense of the word, the Kitchener armies were never demobilized, they died. They were set to perform impossible tasks and such was the wild fury of their charge, such was the madness of their valour, that there were times when the impossible seemed within reach of achievement, and the Germans, sneering and contemptuous of British military leadership, felt themselves insecure in their strongest fortifications against the fierce Berserker onrush of the Anglo-Saxon. But the price to be paid was too high. Brave was their spirit and unflinching, and their spirit lived on even whilst divisions shrivelled into brigades, brigades into battalions, and battalions into companies in the fiery blast of war. Nor was theirs a useless sacrifice, for there came others behind them to whom the memory of their valour and the thought of their sacrifice were a cherished inspiration. The Kitchener armies stepped into the breach and held the foe in play, whilst the Spirit of England, never greater or more formidable than amidst disaster and defeat, rose to a supreme height of sacrifice. They died not in vain, but they died in their hundreds of thousands, rich man and poor man, soldiers and chiefs, the bones of the Kitchener armies moulder in the myriad graves of France and Flanders. There they lie, shoulder to shoulder as they fought and fell, Cockneys, North Countrymen, West Countrymen, English, Scots and Irish, and men from the Dominions overseas. Until the Last Trump shall sound, and the Sea give up its Dead, and the Kitchener armies with the Chieftain who had gone before, shall rise from their earthly sepulchres in a final Grand Parade 'neath God's Great Judgment Seat.

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