

V-Why the Germans Failed on the Western Front

BY PHILIP GIBBS

(Copyright, 1909, by the McClure Newspaper Syndicate.) The generalship and staff work of the German army was in many ways masterly, and far higher in efficiency and knowledge during the first two years of the war than that of the British, and even of the French...

with the German people, had long been obsessed with the bogey of Russian armies began to move westward they were undoubtedly stricken with fear at the vision of the Russian "team-roller." For two years they sacrificed vast numbers of their finest troops to put their weight against the Russian mass and to roll it back through blood and mud, gaining spectacular and high-sounding victories which set the joy-bells ringing in Germany, and led to Bolshevism...

had been a more terrible and deadly menace to England, and therefore to France and all of us. But von Kluck, acting under the orders of his General Staff, drove steadily toward leaving the coast as fruit to be picked later, and intending to drive a wedge past Paris, which would then fall into his hands as the best fruit of all. Three things upset his reckoning and spoiled his plan. The first was the survival of the little British army as a fighting force when he thought it was annihilated; and the second and no less important, was the genius of a certain French general named Foch, not then famous in the world; and the third was the spiritual exultation of the French troops which lifted them suddenly from the despair of their first tragedies and made them certain, with a fine, wonderful faith, that they would turn back the German tide.

midst of their dead and wounded, again, victory might have gone to the enemy had he known our extreme weakness and made use of his own strength to the utmost. But he hesitated to deliver the last attack because of his own fearful losses, and the British held Ypres, and never let go.

The "Great Swindle." As early as the autumn of 1916 I began to see signs of revolt among German soldiers against the slaughter to which they had to sacrifice themselves. Many prisoners whom I spoke had abandoned hope of victory even then, and cursed their leaders. In letters which I grabbed from German dug-outs, and in thousands of letters which fell into the hands of our intelligence officers, there were cries of agony and despair from the civilian people writing to their men in the field. Again and again people writing from many different towns used the same phrase to describe the war. They called it "The Great Swindle." Revolution was beginning its murmur, and soldiers were talking of desertion and beginning to desert. Then in the spring of 1918 the German Headquarters Staff prepared to play their last card on a gambler's venture. They believed that at last they held the trump card to redeem all their losses. Russia was out of the war definitely and absolutely, and after the infamous treaty of Brest-Litovsk the German war lords hurried over to the western front nearly all their divisions which had been in the east. They did not know that many of these troops had been converted to the Bolshevik philosophy of pacifism. They failed once again to give credit to the unbreakable faith and courage of the French and British. They did not believe that the American armies would arrive in time to count. The German people knew of the coming offensive and waited for it with blood-shot eyes and a kind of last parting hope. The German officers were mostly confident of success. The German soldiers shrugged their shoulders and said: "It will be another shambles."

ing retreat with heroic rear guard action, first to the outskirts of Amiens and then to the outskirts of Ypres, losing all their gains in two years of costly fighting except the losses they had inflicted on the enemy's man-power. Then the French line broke at the Chemin des Dames, and they, too, fell back to the Marne, and once again the Germans drew near to Paris. It seemed to them as though at last they had indeed the game in their hands. But it was only ignorance and stupidity which made them think so. They did not take into consideration the genius of Marshal Foch nor the tenacity of the British and French, nor the striking power of the Americans now ready to attack with many divisions, and now rushing across the Atlantic in a great tide.

had gone before, were sent out from England and Scotland to fill up the gaps in the British army, and with the Canadians and Australians, supported later by three American divisions, they began a counter-offensive and fought a battle every day, when they smashed the enemy out of his lines of defence, broke through his best and strongest defensive system—the Hindenburg line—captured many great cities—Lille, Tourcoing, Roubaix, Cambrai, Tournai, Donal, Valenciennes, Maubeuge—and entered the little old town of Mons, where the British army had first withstood the shock of German arms—on the morning before the armistice—ended all fighting with the most abject and humiliating surrender of any great power in the history of the modern world.

And yet they failed. Germans Ignored the Human Soul. By striking through Belgium, which was almost defenceless against their onrush, they gained their first and frightful advantage. The French General Staff, who ought to have known through their intelligence branch what was common talk in German military circles long before the war, failed to anticipate this northern attack and exposed themselves to its thrust by concentrating all their best troops behind the eastern frontier. In spite also of the forty years' menace against them, the French were utterly unprepared for war of the kind that was to happen, and were desperately short of equipment, heavy guns, ammunition and transport. They committed many grievous mistakes, and had paid a frightful price for them by the time they had weeded out their older and unscientific generals, reorganized their methods of defence, devoted the whole energy of the nation to the production of war material, and gave important commands to younger men of scientific ability. They were late in making these reforms, and the Germans had struck deep down into France before they were made. And yet the Germans failed on the western front.

Her First Colossal Blunder. The first colossal blunder of the enemy was in August of 1914, when his armies were striking down through France in five columns. General von Kluck was commanding the right wing of the German armies and the little British army—the old "Contemptibles"—were fighting back from Mons with a French army on their right largely composed of old "Territorials," who were not reckoned upon as first line troops, and battalions of Senegalese and Moroccan troops had not the same striking power as the French or British. Von Kluck's army passed through Amiens in a great tide, after the retreat of the French from Bapaume, which I saw on a tragic night, and then bore down past Beuvry and Meaux to Creil and Chantilly, not far from Paris. The game seemed easy to him, but in his confidence he did not trouble to take advantage of one supreme chance which was his, and that was the capture of the channel ports. For a little while they were at his mercy.

Foch Speaks Memorable Words. On a day when it seemed possible that the whole French line might have to fall back to the Marne, so that Paris itself would be abandoned to the orgies of a conquering army, Foch in the centre of the French line said, in spirit, if not in those exact words (I was told then by the son of the French Chief-of-Staff): "I am not going to retreat. I am going to attack." He attacked late in the evening when the Germans had lit their bivouac fires, believing that the fighting of the day was over, and he sent the Crown Prince's army reeling back from the Marne. The whole German line had to fall back to the Aisne to conform with the retreat in the centre, and Von Kluck's army on the German right, nearest to Paris, had to retreat in disorder, fighting bloody rear-guard actions.

Thick Brown Living Line of British. The Germans now made a colossal and enduring error in their war-plan, and by that stupidity lost their supreme chance of victory. They established themselves in trench positions on the Western front and were content to hold the line in defensive and stationary warfare for more than a year while they devoted their main energies of attack on the Eastern front. That gave England the time to build up a new army on a vast scale, to make guns by thousands, to manufacture high explosives by millions of tons, to rally up the young manhood of all her Empire, and to blockade Germany by a world-wide net of sea-power.

German War Lords Take Gambler's Chance. By this time the war-lords of Germany began to take leave of their senses under the desperate strain of their position. They no longer acted on the laws of military science, but on the gambler's instinct. With a most incredible folly they took the risk of adding the greatest power in the world—in numbers of men and in potential energy—to their list of enemies. With almost deliberate carelessness they flouted the United States and forced her to declare war. Their temptation was great. The British naval blockade was causing severe suffering by food shortage to the German people and denying them access to raw material which they needed for the machinery of war. The submarine campaign, ruthlessly carried out, would, and did, inflict great damage to British and Allied shipping, and was a deadly menace to England. But German calculations were utterly wrong in estimating the amount of time needed to break her bonds by submarine warfare before America could send over great armies to Europe, and the German war-lords were wrong again in underestimating the defensive and offensive success of the British Navy and the Mercantile Marine against submarine activities.

German War Machine Smashed. The Americans and the French, up to the time of the armistice, drove the enemy before them between the Argonne and Rheims, and the Allied armies on all parts of the Western front captured hundreds of thousands of prisoners, many thousands of guns, scores of thousands of machine guns, and vast stores of the enemy's material of war, so that the German war machine was smashed to bits by November 11th, 1918. Not only was the machine smashed, but the spirit of the German army and of the German people was broken also—broken to the dust of an unavailing despair.

Generals that morning when German generals crossed the Allied lines with the white flag of surrender it was revealed to them in a blinding light that they were ruined. They knew that behind the American divisions already in action against them, and proving heroic quality as fighting men, there was a New World in arms, ready to pour millions of men across the Atlantic in an irresistible tide. They knew also that their own reserves of manhood were exhausted, that they could call up no more youth for gun-fodder, and that having failed in their last reckless gamble with fate all was lost. The German war lords, in spite of their military science, their skill in generalship, their mastery knowledge of organization, had committed enormous blunders and in the larger knowledge of life and war had been as blind as bats and as stupid as owls. They lacked material strength in the brave peoples beat them from the time of those early days when all the odds were in their favor. The German Empire had committed suicide.

To answer that question it is necessary to take the whole of the German war plan into consideration, both East and West, and to analyze a little the peculiar psychology of the German mind. In my opinion the worst of the war was entirely by reason of their psychological stupidity, which was the overwhelming weakness behind their military technique. In other words, they had manufactured a terrible war machine before it was in its mechanism, but guided by men stone-blind to the soul in human nature.

Germans Could Have Had Channel Ports. I saw the last uniformed men—custom officers, firemen and policemen—leave Boulogne, which lay open to the sea, and Dieppe were undefended. The British army had moved its base from Boulogne to St. Nazaire, away down south. At that time Germany could have seized the coast for nothing, which afterwards they fought desperately and in vain to get. With that coast in her hands her submarine warfare would

ended upon it? Drink, there is your answer in one word. The idea of the book seems to be to show England as it really was in those days, as seen through the eyes of a man who, through the medium of another world and was sojourning amongst strange conditions. The picture is not a pleasing one, the prospect held out before the reader for success in the war is not bright. But the victory has now been won, and people will perhaps drop back into old ways. But this novel by Joseph Hocking will do much to help the people of British countries learn where the weakness of their civilization lies, and may help them to overcome that weakness.

THE EMBLEMS OF FIDELITY. By James Lane Allen, 219 Pages, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, Publishers. The plant known by the name of the emblem of fidelity, the fern, and the story in this book circles around a certain species of fern which, according to the author, is only found in a certain mountain region in Kentucky. An American author comes into touch with an English critic through a book in which he describes a fern in Kentucky adorned with beautiful ferns. The Englishman has a strong desire to secure specimens of these ferns, and then the comedy starts. The book is written in the form of a series of letters between the principal characters, and the mishaps which occur in the shipment of the



BOOKS and their AUTHORS

THE POMP OF YESTERDAY. By Joseph Hocking, 320 Pages, Price \$1.25. Hodder & Stoughton, Toronto, Publishers. Joseph Hocking has been most prolific in turning out war books, the majority of which have been spy stories, but in "The Pomp of Yesterday," he has produced something different from the usual. His story, as the title suggests, is based upon a verse of Kipling's, "Recessional." It is, indeed, one of the finest pieces of British propaganda work that was written during the war, although the publication was delayed too long for the book to accomplish much good. The hero in the story is a man who has been in the memory during some adventures in India. He arrives in England soon after the commencement of the war, and attends a recruiting meeting. As he

has no recollection of ever having heard anything about the war or the causes of it, the speeches have a tremendous effect upon him, and he immediately enlists. He is befriended by the speaker, Captain Luscombe, and goes into action on the western front. Captain Luscombe, while visiting some friends, tells them the story of his protégé, and causes some little excitement in the minds of two aristocratic young men, who evidently find in the story something personal. He also awakens the interest of Lorna Bolivick, daughter of an English baronet, who demands that he shall inform her of the doings of the hero.

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The Appetite of Youth Quickly Restored. Appetite is useless unless digestion is good. Dr. Hamilton's Pills make tremendous appetite and keep digestion up to the mark as well. The liver, bowels and kidneys are stimulated, the stomach strengthened, and robust health quickly follows. Dr. Hamilton's Pills in their vigor and snap into the system, make folks feel youthful and happy. You'll forget you have a stomach, forget your days of sickness if Dr. Hamilton's Pills are used. Insist on having Dr. Hamilton's Pills, 25c per box, no other medicine so good.

past life, and also the rivalry of another, is sufficient to keep him from realizing his object. One day, however, at a party, he receives a sudden shock, and meets his mother and father. Memory comes back, his position is assured, and the story ends with his union with Lorna. Such is the thread of the story, but the plot and the characters are used by Joseph Hocking to pour upon the people of Britain a strong condemnation of their methods of carrying on the war. He looks out upon the sin and vice in the country, and asks how the people expect to win in what he terms a holy war when they themselves are steeped in iniquity. The drink traffic comes in for special condemnation. In a stirring little speech the hero says: "The boat by which I came to France was held up in the harbour for twenty-four hours. Why? I am not talking without my book, and I will tell you why. The men were in public-houses, and would not come away. And the government allowed these public-houses to be open; the government allowed these freemen to drink until they were in an unfit condition to take up arms. The government allowed the stuff that robbed them of their manhood, and their sense of responsibility, to be manufactured. The government allowed private individuals to make fortunes out of that stuff. Just think of it. There we were, all waiting, but we could not go. Why could we not go? Why were we held up, when the lives of thousands of others depended on us? When the success of the war—probably de-

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"I Do Not Know Just What Is The Matter But I Seem To Be Losing My Grip" "WELL, I know. You have been worrying too much until you have got your nervous system all run down." "I could not help that. I guess you would worry, too, if you had all the troubles I have had." "Perhaps. But I think I have learned a lesson. Worrying does not get you anywhere." "Well, what am I to do?" "If you will take my advice you will use Dr. Chase's Nerve Food. That is what got my nervous system right when I had that breakdown a couple of years ago, and I have been talking it up ever since." "How will it benefit me?" "It will restore vigor to your nervous system. The trouble is now that your nerve force is at such a low ebb that your vital organs are slow and weak in action. You do not get the good of the food you eat, and for this reason you have no chance of gaining strength and vitality." "But how long will I have to take this treatment?" "If you could take a rest it would help some, but mark my words you will not be using the Nerve Food more than a week or two before you begin to see the benefits, and then you will not need me to encourage you in its use." "I think I will follow your advice, for judging from what you say the Nerve Food is exactly what I need." "You will not be sorry, for I have recommended it to scores of men in just such condition as you are to-day, and I know just what it will do." "Thank you, old man, I only hope it will give me such energy and vitality as you have." "It certainly will if you give it a fair chance." Dr. Chase's Nerve Food, 50 cents a box, 6 for \$2.75, all dealers, or Edmondson, Bates & Co., Ltd., Toronto. On every box of the genuine you will find the portrait and signature of A. W. Chase, M.D., the famous Receipt Book author.