

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GERMAN ADVANCE TO BRUSSELS.

BELGIUM'S REAL AMBITIONS—SOCIAL REFORM—THE NEGLECT OF MILITARISM—PREPARATIONS COME TOO LATE—HOPES OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE—THE PEASANT GUARDS—GERMAN CAVALRY ADVANCE—FIRST SKIRMISHES—THE BATTLE OF HAELEN—EGHEZEE—FRENCH TROOPS IN BELGIUM—THE GERMAN ADVANCE IN EARNEST—BELGIAN RETREAT ON ANTWERP—BELGIAN STAFF EXPLANATION—THE POSITION IN BRUSSELS—REFUGEES—GROWING PUBLIC ALARM—GOVERNMENT RETIRES TO ANTWERP—FALSE HOPES OF VICTORY—M. MAX—THE GERMAN ENTRY INTO BRUSSELS.

THE position of Belgium in the days immediately following the outbreak of the war was one of obvious peril.

The forts of Liége controlled the main roads from Germany to the coast, but Liége could not hope to hold out against a resolute German attack for more than a few days. Once Liége fell, there were no effective fortress defences between the German frontier and Antwerp. Brussels was an open city, and the battles for its possession must be fought, not in its suburbs, but farther afield, in the neighbouring districts of Aerschot, Diest, Louvain, and Wavre. If Germany made a sustained attempt to conquer Belgium, it was evident that no unaided effort of the Belgians could save it. The hope of the nation lay in two possibilities, the arrival of immediate aid from England and France, or the chance that the German Armies would advance, not to the coast, but straight to Paris. The road to Paris lay to the west. Hence, even although day by day the news from the front foreshadowed the early capture of Liége, the people of Northern Belgium hoped against hope that their homes, at least, would escape the horrors of foreign occupation.

The country on the Franco-Belgian frontier between the Lys and the Yser and the valley of the Somme below Amiens could be flooded, from which it seemed to follow that the right of

the main German advance on Paris would be limited by the line Liége-Brussels-Lille-Amiens. The Germans were very unlikely to make considerable detachments until after their main object—the rout of the hostile field armies—had been attained. Hence it was likely that the whole country west and north of the line indicated would escape effective occupation until after the German advance on Paris had succeeded or failed.

To the people of Belgium war came undesired and unsought. They had nothing to gain by it and everything to lose. Social reform, not militarism, had been their aim. The Army, and all that had to do with the Army, was for long regarded with a feeling of indifference not untouched with contempt. There was no strong military caste, as in France and Germany. Trusting to the pledged word of Europe, guaranteeing Belgian independence and permanent neutrality, the Belgian Parliament had until 1912 neglected adequate preparations for national defence. Compulsory service was only compulsory for the poor or those without influence; the time of training was far too short. Service in the ranks was regarded as a task to be avoided whenever opportunity offered. While France and Germany endured the heaviest burdens to maintain their fighting strength, Belgium devoted herself to commercial and industrial progress.



NAMUR, FROM THE MEUSE, BEFORE BOMBARDMENT.
Showing the Citadel Hotel and Fortifications.

Social problems, arising out of the density of the population and the comparative poverty of a large number of the people, were the main subjects of public concern. Industry was carefully encouraged. Cooperative experiments were initiated, and the standard of well-being of the people was appreciably raised. The Belgians were able to boast—with a large degree of truth—that their country afforded the maximum of comfort and the minimum of expense for those living in it of any part of Western Europe. Belgian manufactures steadily gained reputation. The products of the Cockerill Ironworks at Liège, for example, competed successfully with those of Germany, England, and America. Belgium became a favourite centre for the erection of factories, many German and British firms maintaining works on the various river banks. Antwerp grew to be one of the largest and best-equipped shipping ports in Europe. Belgian finance was making itself more and more felt in certain specialized fields. The Belgians were markedly active in the newer markets of the world. In China and in Central Africa, in South America and in Manchuria, their representatives were found seeking concessions, laying railways, promoting electrical schemes, and acquiring power.

Belgium, with its ideal geographical position

and its widespread prosperity, aroused the envy and desire of its ambitious and powerful neighbour to the south-east. Germany wanted an outlet to the sea—Antwerp and Zeebrugge would afford it. Germany wanted an open road to the heart of France—the road lay right through Southern Belgium. It was the unhappy fortune of this little kingdom to be the Naboth's Vineyard of Europe.

It is true that since 1912, alarmed by the growing German menace, sustained efforts had been made to remedy the backward defences of the country and to recreate the Army. But a great national army cannot be created in less than two years. Thus Belgium found herself at the outbreak of the war lacking trained fighting men, lacking in equipment, lacking in officers, and lacking in experience. What was not lacking, as events soon proved, was boldness, courage, and eagerness to meet the foe.

Had the Belgians been given time, they might have raised and trained within a few months a force of half a million men that could have at least held up the Germans along prepared lines of fortified places until France and England could come to their aid. But time was the one thing denied Belgium. Her borders ran, from Visé to Luxemburg, next to those of Germany. The German railways from

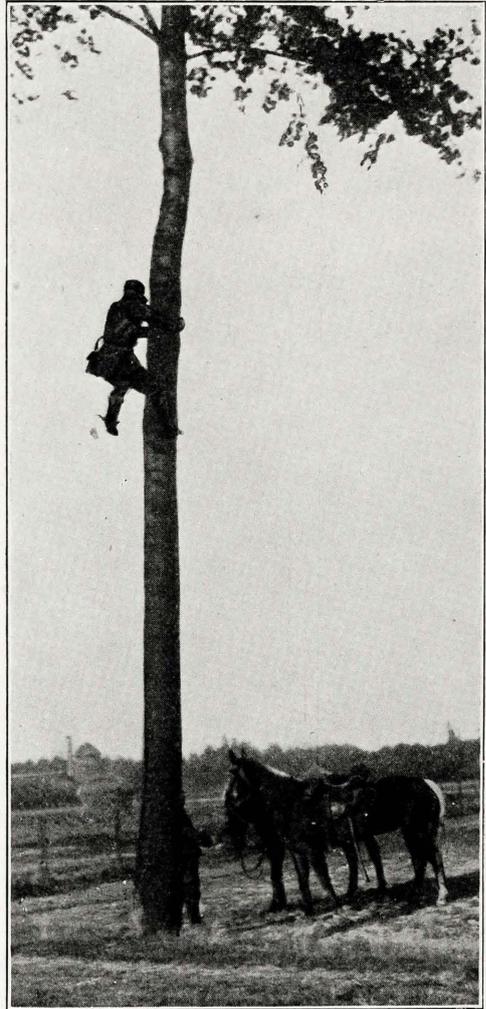
Düsseldorf, Cologne, and Coblenz could bring strong armies into Belgian territory in a few hours, and line after line of long sidings were already prepared at each frontier station from which the troop trains could disgorge their men in the shortest possible time. The military headquarters at Aix-la-Chapelle were practically within sight of Belgian soil. Germany had made all her preparations to strike at Belgium suddenly and overwhelmingly. Even before war was declared German troops crossed the border. Allowing for the necessary troops for the fortresses of Namur and Antwerp, Belgium could put on the fighting line after the fall of Liège only a Field Army of about 110,000 men to guard the road to Brussels and the north. Against these the Germans could easily bring a quarter of a million men and as many more as might be necessary.

The Belgians did not, perhaps, anticipate having to conduct their own defence for more than a few days at the outside. They believed that the British and the French would be able to give them strong help at once. Day after day, at the beginning of the war, crowds of people stood on the front at Ostend, many of them with powerful glasses, searching the horizon for the first signs of the coming of the British Relief Expedition. Every Englishman throughout the country was constantly asked: "When will your troops arrive?" When news came to hand that a British Expeditionary Force had left England, Brussels papers stated that it was landing at Zeebrugge and Ostend, and would soon be fighting on the Meuse. On more than one occasion crowds hurried to the Gare du Nord at Brussels on the rumour that the British had come, prepared to give them a great welcome.

The Belgians were equally confident of French assistance. They assumed that French armies assembled between Namur and Verdun would move eastwards through Belgian Luxembourg and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Belgian hopes of the cooperation of the French were encouraged by the appearance of French Staff Officers in Brussels and of French cavalry in apparent strength from Longwy northwards to Gembloux. Reports were received that the French were advancing in force eastwards from Namur along the banks of the Meuse towards Liège. It was known that they were strongly holding the strategic triangular position where the Sambre and the Meuse meet close to Namur.

The Belgian people, as has been said, knew that their Army was in itself insufficient to offer any permanent resistance to a German

attack. This, however, did not check the resolution of the people to fight to the last. A wave of patriotism swept over the nation that wiped away all local and party differences. The King voiced the cry "Aux armes!" and led the way to the trenches. He became in an hour the popular idol, and men who had persistently sought his overthrow admitted gladly: "If we make Belgium a republic, we will have Albert as our first President." The Socialists, a powerful and numerous group, who in the past had led the cause of pacifism and opposed Army reform, were now among the first to volunteer for war. The Prime Minister invited the cooperation of all parties. M. Vandervelde, the Labour leader, was appointed a Minister of State and voiced the sentiments of his party when he declared that the workers would defend their country when attacked with



A BELGIAN LOOK-OUT MAN.

[Daily Mirror.



GERMAN FIELD KITCHEN CAPTURED AND USED BY THE BELGIANS.

[Sport and General.

the same ardour with which they had defended their liberties in the past. *Le Peuple*, the organ of the Labour Party, called upon the workers to arm: "Why do we," it asked, "as irreconcilable anti-militarists, cry 'Bravo!' from the bottom of our hearts to all those who offer themselves for the defence of the country? Because it is not only necessary to protect the hearths and homes, the women and the children, but it is also necessary to protect at the price of our blood the heritage of our ancient freedom.

"Go, then, sons of the workers, and register your names as recruits. We will rather die for the idea of progress and solidarity of humanity than live under a regime whose brutal force and savage violence have wiped out right."

While the German troops were flinging themselves against Liège, the Belgians were preparing for a stubborn national defence. The Army was already at its post, the reserves had been called up, the Civil Guard were being armed, and the towns and villages south of Brussels from Hasselt to Gembloux and Namur were held in force. The peasants in many villages gathered together. They brought out their guns—ancient fowling-pieces, rook rifles, sporting guns, anything they had. Those who had no guns could at least secure knives. They banded

themselves together and formed local guards. No stranger could pass without satisfying them concerning his business. "As showing how all the roads leading to the front are guarded," wrote one correspondent who attempted to reach the front at this time, "I may say that I was stopped during a journey of 70 kilometres no fewer than 52 times by police, civil guards, soldiers, and, last but not least, by peasants. These latter are armed with the most varied collection of guns, far more fearful and wonderful than any I have seen outside of a museum. Many carry in addition bayonets which certainly must have been picked up on the field of Waterloo. They shout in bad French and Flemish for any innocent voyager to stop, and swarm round your car with the firm conviction that you are a spy. Passports signed by the highest military and civil authorities in the country are often of no avail whatever."

A spy fever spread over the country, and there was good cause for it. People who had lived in different parts for years as trusted neighbours suddenly disappeared, only to return later as guides for advance parties of the German Army. Others were discovered attempting to injure telegraphs and railways or endeavouring, by carrier pigeons and other means, to keep up communication with the Germans on the

frontier. Some were disguised as monks or nuns, some as parish priests, some controlled secret wireless apparatus. The German espionage department proved its efficiency here as elsewhere in the early days of the war.

The uprising of the peasants, admirable as it was as a revelation of national spirit, was useless, if not worse than useless, from the point of view of real fighting strength. Chance groups of ill-armed and untrained civilians can present no effective resistance to regular troops. The Belgian peasants caught a certain number of isolated Uhlans, thus giving an excuse for subsequent German severity against the people at large. Soon their own authorities asked them to desist. The German commanders let it be known that they would show no mercy to civilians who took up arms, but would treat them *and the districts from which they operated* with the utmost rigour. For civilians generally there was to be one penalty for resistance—death. The places where they fought were to be burned to the ground. Even the civil guards, uniformed though they were, were to be treated as civilians and shot at once when caught with arms in their hands.

The Belgian authorities posted notices throughout the country warning civilians that they must not resist German troops, but must leave military measures to the Army. The peasant uprising did not delay the main advance of the German Army for an hour. It ended almost as quickly as it began, but not before a large number of men and boys of all ages throughout Brabant, Namur, Liège, and Belgian Luxembourg had been sacrificed. It served to emphasize the lesson that resistance to a powerful enemy must be organized in advance. The man who refuses to serve his country in times of peace by preparing for war may find, when real national danger comes, that his only occupation must be to sit down and do nothing because he is—from a military point of view—good for nothing.

The little Belgian Army used the time at its disposal during the German delay in front of Liège to the best advantage. The whole southern countryside was prepared for resistance. Roadways were blown up with dynamite sticks. Cunning traps were laid across the roads for the Uhlans, low and almost invisible barriers of barbed wire being arranged in two parts in such a way that ordinary traffic could pass in safety with care but any attempt



BELGIAN SOLDIERS HAVING THEIR MIDDAY MEAL.

(Underwood and Underwood.)

to rush by would inevitably bring horses and riders to the ground. The country southward of Louvain lent itself to guerilla warfare, being well wooded and suitable for the concealment of small parties of troops.

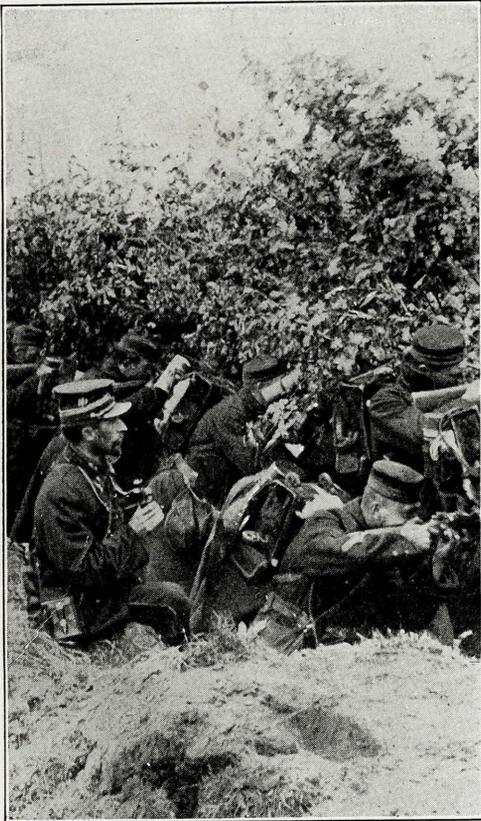
The sustained resistance of General Leman and his garrison at Liège, described in the previous chapter, gave the main Belgian Army a few days of grace. Liège was the principal railway centre for the lines southwards, the main roads ran through there, and the important bridges across the Meuse lay under the reach of its guns. When the Belgian troops blew up the bridge at Visé in the opening hours of the war, the Germans at once attempted to throw pontoon bridges across the river. Their first efforts were continuously unsuccessful. At Visé itself they built no fewer than 20 pontoon bridges, it is reported, each one being immediately destroyed by the guns of the Liège forts. One bridge was, however, erected within 200 yards of the Dutch frontier and considerable forces were poured in over it.

While the Germans were waiting around Liège for the arrival of their large siege guns

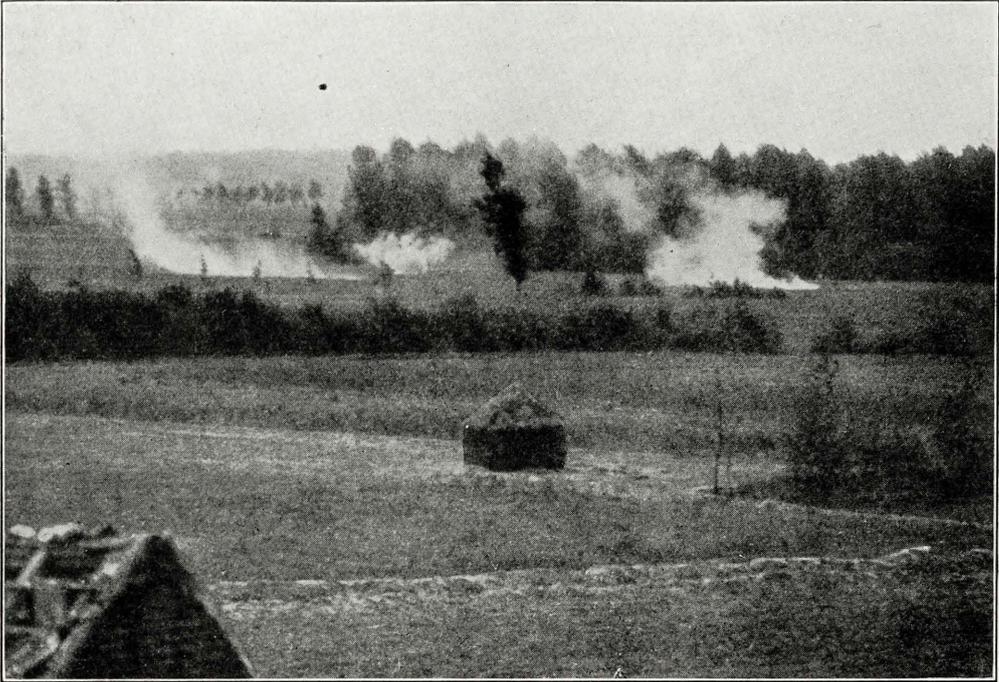
which were to destroy the forts, a strong force—no fewer than five army corps—was brought into the region to the south of the river. A cavalry screen was thrown across the river and proceeded to overrun the countryside. Following the plan that had proved so successful in the Franco-Prussian War, little bands of Uhlans, Hussars, and Cuirassiers were sent out throughout the north. Many of these were apparently ill-equipped for their task. They had no proper supply of maps, and they did not seem to have any definite plan except to move ahead until they got in touch with the Belgians. They had very little food. This was probably deliberately arranged in order to make them live on the country. Many of them were captured and many were killed. It is possible that the dispatch of these unsupported and isolated little bands was purposely devised, not alone to keep in complete touch with the enemy, but also to give the Belgians a false idea of the German preparations. It is a well-known and admitted principle of German military strategy to make a show of weakness until preparations are completed which enable an army to strike with its full strength. And if the German cavalry were defeated at some places they drove terror home in others.

Soon the reputation of the Uhlans spread through hundreds of villages, as that of men who spared neither themselves nor their foes, who rode recklessly against any enemy in sight, who died with a laugh when beaten, and who slew man and boy, ruined women and burned homes without compunction and without mercy wherever they went. It is not necessary at this point to inquire how far this reputation was deserved, or how far the advancing German cavalry were actually guilty of the charges soon to be laid against them. It is clear, however, that their instructions were not only to find out what forces were in front of them and what serious resistance would have to be faced, but also to strike fear into the hearts of the people.

The countryside between Liège and Louvain presented a sombre picture in these early days of the war. The fields were ripe for harvest, but there were no men to spare to gather the crops of golden corn, and the women and children had in many cases fled northwards. In the villages some houses had been destroyed by the Belgians themselves lest they should afford protection for the enemy, while others had been burned down by advancing Germans. Every road was barricaded, and behind the lines of barrels and bushes and the earthen



BELGIAN SOLDIERS FIRING FROM COVER. (Underwood & Underwood.)



GERMAN SHELLS BURSTING IN A FIELD NEAR THE BELGIAN POSITION WHERE INFANTRY WERE CONCEALED.

[Daily Mirror.]

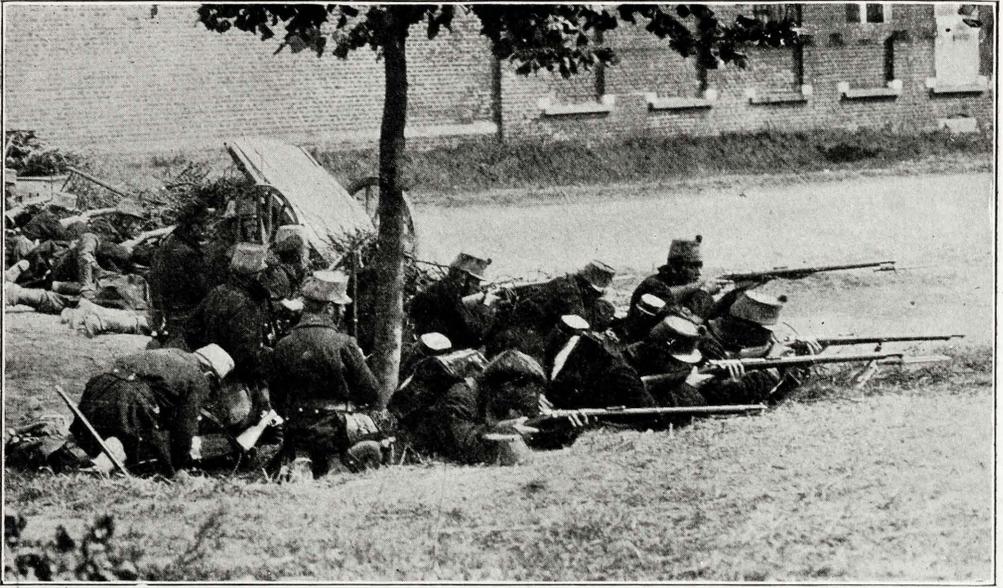
embankments little companies of soldiers and civil guards lay waiting. Many of these men were reservists who had been called up almost without notice—fathers of families and responsible citizens whose hearts were still full of anxiety for their families and their affairs. Already they showed, however, abundant signs that the ancient courage of the men of Flanders could still be counted upon. There was a gay grimness among them that betrayed the born fighting man. Their discipline was lax, their military knowledge was in many cases trivial, and they were ill-prepared for the physical and material strain of day-and-night work against an active foe in the open. But none could deny their courage or their zeal. The pity of it was that men so brave and so fine should not have been more fully prepared for the tremendous task ahead.

Many regiments started out accompanied by priests, who exhorted the soldiers to fight for their country and their faith. The wives and friends of the soldiers visited them in the very front line of trenches, bringing them food and cigarettes. These men were fighting, many of them just by their homes, almost within sight of their own families. They did not hesitate, however, to sacrifice everything in front of them that could help the enemy. The railways were torn up, bridges were blown into the

air whenever possible, and tunnels were blocked by derailing locomotives and then sending others crashing into them, forming one great tangled and mixed mass. The Belgians laid part of the country to waste—the Germans, as they advanced, completed the work.

The Belgians at first made some use of aeroplanes for reconnoitring purposes. But their own peasants and volunteers fired on every aeroplane they saw, and there is only too much reason to believe that they brought down several Belgian aeroplanes in that way. Orders were issued when too late to stop this indiscriminate shooting. Gradually, as the German armoured Taube aeroplanes came into action, less and less was heard of the Belgian aircraft, and before the fall of Brussels the German aeroplanes apparently held supremacy of the air.

At the end of the first week the Belgian military authorities expressed considerable satisfaction with the state of affairs. Liège was still holding out and was engaging the attention of three German Army Corps. In numerous minor engagements the Belgian troops had proved their mettle. The Belgian cavalry in particular had distinguished themselves by the most reckless bravery. "Tout est calme. Tout va bien" was the phrase on many lips. Reports were even circulated that the Germans were contemplating retirement and were entrenching



THE LAST STAND MADE BY THE BELGIANS AT LOUVAIN.

[Record Press.]

themselves on the banks of the river Ourthe and in Luxemburg to protect their retreat.

The reality was very different. The Germans had at last succeeded in erecting a bridge at Lixhe over which their cavalry and heavy artillery could be conveyed. A considerable force of cavalry had already crossed the river, and this made a preliminary advance while the main force took up its position.

On Sunday, August 9, two divisions of German cavalry, numbering about 7,000 sabres, and supported by infantry, moved upwards towards the Hesbaye. The people of Tongres were surprised that day to find a detachment of the enemy riding down their main street. There was a sudden panic, and people hastily closed and barred their windows and locked their doors, leaving the roadways deserted. The cavalry rode to the town hall, and there ordered the mayor to produce his money chest and to lower the Belgian flag hanging out of the window. The mayor refused to lower the flag, whereupon the Germans lowered it for him. They appropriated the town's money and seized 10,000 francs at the post office. Then they ordered food, for which they paid, and had a meal in the market place.

Cavalry moved forward along different roads and joined issue with the Belgian troops all along the line at St. Trond, Tirlemont, Osmael, Guxenhoven, and at smaller places. The German troops were accompanied by motor machine-guns, which did great execution. It is evident that their purpose was only to

reconnoitre and not to engage in serious battle, for, after some skirmishing, they retired. The Belgians imagined that they had defeated and driven them back.

On the next day word came into Louvain, the Belgian Military Headquarters, that a German scouting force of 6,000 cavalry was moving upwards close to the Dutch frontier. That same afternoon the Germans captured Landen, only 38 miles east of Brussels. A passenger train was stopped when it arrived there by a strong force of the enemy. The Germans destroyed the telegraphic apparatus and the railway signals and tore up the rails, and then moved on.

In addition to the cavalry reconnaissance, military aeroplanes were now to be seen advancing and hovering at great height over the Belgian positions.

Another engagement was reported at Tirlemont, where there was a fierce charge of Belgian lancers against German Uhlans. The lancers routed the Germans, who returned later, however, with reinforcements and with machine-guns and forced the Belgians, in turn, to fall back upon their infantry supports.

Hasselt was the scene of a sustained fight. Here a German cavalry division supported by a battalion of infantry and 12 guns attacked a Belgian force consisting of a cavalry division and a brigade of infantry. The place was taken and retaken three times.

It became evident that the plan of the German Army was to move northwards through the plain between Hasselt and Haelen and to seek

to turn the Belgian Army. So long as the Belgians could hold the line they had taken up from Hasselt to St. Trond and Tirlemont, all was well. But this line was soon broken, and strong German forces attacked Hasselt on the one side and Haelen and Diest on the other.

Early on the morning of August 12 a force of German cavalry, estimated at 10,000 men, accompanied by artillery and a few infantry, moved forward from various directions towards Haelen and Diest. The country in this region is intersected by three tributaries of the River Demer, the Herck, Gethe, and Velp. In order to reach Diest it was necessary to cross the Gethe at Haelen. The Belgians were fully informed of the German advance and had laid their plans to meet them at this spot. Barricades were erected and trenches dug and field artillery placed in advantageous positions. The Germans approached about 11 o'clock in the morning and were allowed to draw comparatively near, when the Belgian artillery opened on them. The German guns were quickly unlimbered and an artillery duel followed. The Belgians had their ranges and were able to plant their shrapnel over the cavalry with great effect. The utmost violence and courage were shown on either side. The Belgian cavalry attempted to charge the Germans but failed on account of

the broken nature of the ground. The German cavalry in turn came on at a gallop against the Belgian barricades. As they approached, machine guns that had been concealed opened on them, sweeping many away. Notwithstanding their losses the Germans rode right up to the barricades, attempting to break through them or to tear them down. The effort was hopeless, and after losing three-fifths of their effective strength the Germans had to retire.

Other German forces attempted to advance at Cortenaeken. There were fights at several river bridges. Everywhere the result was the same. The Belgians themselves were the first to proclaim the great courage shown by the Germans in this sustained engagement. At one point when they were driven back the survivors sought to entrench themselves behind a rampart of dead horses and dead men.

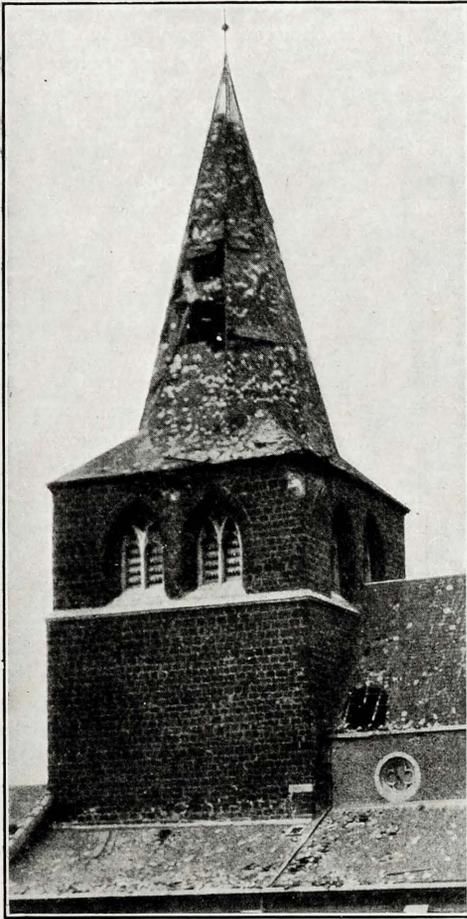
Compared with the fighting that was soon to follow, the engagement at Haelen and Diest may seem too small to demand much attention. It was a striking example, however, of the way in which the Belgian soldiers, many of them called to the colours from the reserves only a fortnight before, were able to face the foe. Several stories were told of the conduct of the Belgian troops. Here is one:—

“ One notable instance of Belgian bravery



GERMANS HOLDING A REVIEW IN RUINED LOUVAIN.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]



THE CHURCH AT HAELN.

All Belgian Churches appear to have afforded special targets for the Germans.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]

is found in the conduct of a farrier sergeant, Rousseau, of the Chasseurs à Cheval. At the head of eight men he charged a whole squadron of Uhlans, who dispersed, leaving many dead and wounded. The brave squadron of Belgians returned in triumph to Haeln with a dozen excellent horses as trophies of their exploit.

"During the afternoon Lieutenant Van Doren, who was specially detailed to defend Diest, was asked to send reinforcements to the neighbouring village of Zechk. There was a difficulty, insomuch as practically all the available troops had been sent forward to Haeln, but, undismayed, Lieutenant Van Doren summoned the town fire brigade and, picking up as many soldiers as he could from different posts on the road, made a dash for Zechk."

There was a fight at Eghezee, 10 miles to the north of Namur, where a party of 350 Uhlans rode up, preceded by 60 cyclists, who had forcibly requisitioned three motor-cars,

one of them belonging to a doctor of the Belgian Red Cross Service. The Germans stayed at the place for the night, and in the morning a Belgian airman, flying low over the cornfield in which they had parked their horses, drew their fire, thus revealing their whereabouts to some Belgian cyclist scouts, who hurried in the direction of the firing. "The Uhlan cyclists, who were out scouting, saw them coming," wrote the special correspondent of *The Times* in describing the scene, "and rode back as hard as they could to give the alarm. At once there was a general *saute qui peut*. Most of the Germans were sitting quietly in the cafés of the village of Boneffe at the time, talking to the villagers. They rushed off down the road away from Eghezee leaving everything behind them, horses, rifles, mitrailleuse guns, and the requisitioned motor-cars. The few men who were looking after the horses in the cornfield let them loose, the bugler who was with the fugitives sounded a call to which they rallied, and as the pursuers, only about 30 in number, came round the corner of the road into view, the Uhlans threw themselves on to their horses and galloped off. The Belgians meanwhile dashed into a trench in a field of beetroot, about 500 yards off, which had been thrown up last week to repel the expected German advance, and opened fire on the horses and the retreating Uhlans on the road. They killed four or five men in the field and about 35 more in the retreat, including an ober-lieutenant and, it is thought, the colonel and several of the horses."

On Friday, August 14, it was officially announced that French troops had entered Belgium by Charleroi and had joined forces with the Belgian Army. Three French officers had been attached to the Belgian headquarters and two Belgian officers were to represent the Belgian Army with the French troops. The French advanced northwards from Charleroi in the direction of Wavre. They were reported to be holding a very strong position, and numerous engagements were reported between the French and German cavalry.

Then followed a slight pause. The Germans, having discovered the strength of the enemy, awaited reinforcements. Their cavalry scouting parties, however, kept creeping around by the Dutch frontier until some of them were within 25 miles of Antwerp at Gheel and Moll. The Germans, as they travelled across the country, ruined most of the villages they left behind them. They hanged or shot every peasant suspected of resistance; they returned to places where isolated Uhlans had been killed a few days earlier

and razed them to the ground. The mere suspicion of having attacked Germans was sufficient to ensure death. The policy of wholesale terrorism was carried out on too wide a scale to have been anything but a deliberate plan executed in obedience to orders from headquarters. The German General Staff probably aimed not only at terrorizing the Belgians and stamping out any sign of civilian resistance, but also at creating such alarm throughout the neighbouring Dutch districts that the people of Holland would not permit their Government to take steps against so merciless a foe.

The Belgian General Staff continued to issue reassuring bulletins concerning the position at the front, but it could have had no delusions about the real state of things. It became evident, hour by hour, that the position of Brussels was becoming more perilous. Once the Belgian Army was turned Brussels must fall. Should the Germans renew the attack at Diest and succeed, not only would Brussels itself be open, but the entire Field Army would be threatened with capture. Brussels could not be defended. It is true that 20,000 civil guards had been armed with Mauser rifles and the environs of the city had been entrenched and protected with barbed wire entanglements. Trenches manned

with civil guards might be of some service in checking a slight cavalry raid—they could do nothing of any value against the serious advance in force such as it was now more and more apparent the Germans were attempting.

On Monday, August 17, the Germans began their advance in earnest. One strong force drove itself in like a wedge between the French and Belgian Armies in the neighbourhood of Wavre. From Diest, from Tirlemont, and from a hundred villages around came news that the Germans were moving forward in overwhelming force.

The Belgian Army resisted desperately all along the line, but it was hopelessly outnumbered in men, in field artillery, and in machine-guns. All the villages had been made into entrenched camps, with wagons upset across the roadways, wire entanglements erected, and trenches dug. But the Germans adopted tactics before which such precautions were useless. Villages were first overwhelmed with artillery fire. When the Belgian cavalry attempted to repeat their former exploits and charge the enemy they were met by the fire of well-placed machine-guns, before which they were swept away. At the least sign of weakening the German cavalry came on at the charge.



THE VILLAGE OF MELLE.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]

Scene of very fierce fighting. Remains of a German gun carriage.



GERMAN SOLDIERS TENDING THE WOUNDED.

(Newspaper Illustrations.)

Tirlemont was the scene of a specially vigorous attack. Powerful German guns shelled the place with great effect, and then the German cavalry suddenly charged. Their advance was so rapid and so unexpected that numbers of peaceful villagers, women and children, were unable to escape. Hurrying across the fields as quickly as they could it was impossible to get away from the German cavalry, who followed them, shooting and stabbing men and women alike, riding down children, sweeping over the place in a mad, reckless charge.

It became obvious that the Belgian Army could stay no longer in its positions. Further delay might well lead to total destruction. Some regiments were already almost completely wiped out, particularly some of the cavalry. Two mixed brigades were given orders to hold the enemy back at any cost and to cover a retreat in the direction of Antwerp.

The defeat of the Belgian Field Army all along the line was complete and overwhelming. The fighting started early on Monday, August 17th. In the darkness of that night the Belgian retreat began.

Everywhere it was the German artillery that broke the Belgian defence. Now the Belgians were forced back to Vertryck. Next they were at Corbeek Loo, and from Corbeek Loo they had to retire on Louvain, where they were prepared to make a last stand. At this point one consideration stayed them. In view of the way they had been forced back, they could hope to do no more at Louvain than temporarily to arrest the German advance. The Germans, already pressing up, would undoubtedly shell and destroy the town, and would probably put it to the flames as they had already that day burned numerous villages.

To every Belgian Louvain was a city of precious memories, regarded with veneration, to be guarded, protected, and shielded from harm. Its ancient University, its beautiful Town Hall, its quaint 14th-century buildings, and its priceless library, once lost could never be replaced. To risk the destruction of these would be a crime against civilization. Yielding to this consideration, the Belgian Army retired beyond the city and allowed the Germans to enter without opposition. They little imagined—for they had not yet realized the depths to which some German commanders would go—that in surrendering Louvain as they did they were only handing it over to a worse fate and a more remorseless slaughter than any which fighting could have involved.

The position of the Belgian Army was impossible. It could not hope to keep back the Germans. To remain in the open much longer was to invite needless destruction. The spirit of the men was for the moment shaken by the terrific attacks they had endured. The Army was separated from the French. Only one course remained—to abandon Brussels and to retire upon Antwerp. The main fighting had fallen on the 1st, the 2nd, and the 3rd divisions of the Army. The two mixed brigades that covered their retreat held out for some hours against a formidable attack made by the Germans between Becquoboort and Gelrode.

The Belgian Staff considered it necessary to issue a somewhat elaborate explanation of the retirement. It ran as follows:—

“At the present moment the general situation in the Belgian theatre of war may be described as follows:—After having lost a great deal of time, a large number of men, and a great quantity of material, the Prussian Army has managed to gain ground on both banks of the Meuse up to a line where it is in contact with the Allied armies. The German troops on the north side of the Meuse belong to various corps whose operations

have been principally directed against Liège and who in the course of time have become available in other directions. There is also a strong force of cavalry, by means of which the Germans have been able to make a great show by extending to the north and south. In the south they came into collision with our troops and were repulsed. In the north, on the other hand, they found an open road, and small portions of them managed to make dashes far afield.

"In a word, the Germans have taken the measure of our position, but that they should have lost a fortnight in attaining this result is all to the honour of our arms. That may have incalculable consequences for the issues of the operations. The normal development of the latter according to the plan concerted between the Allies may lead to the carrying out of 'manœuvres' — that is to say, to changes of position in order to effect a change in the general situation. We are on the outside wing, where these manœuvres are nearly always necessitated either for the direct or indirect protection of the flank. Our Army therefore must necessarily modify its original positions and thus carry out completely the first task devolving upon it, which consists in gaining time. There is, consequently, no ground for anxiety if the Army makes a movement in such and such a direction, and arm-chair strategists need not occupy themselves with the arrangements made, but

should realize that our Army now belongs to a co-ordinated whole and remember that the strategic conditions have entirely changed since close contact has been established with our allies on our right.

"The object of the operations as at present going on is not to cover such and such a district or such and such a town, which has now become a matter of only secondary importance.

"The pursuit of the aim assigned to the Belgian troops in the general plan of campaign preponderates over everything. This object cannot be revealed, and the most well-informed persons are unable to discover it, in view of the veil of obscurity which is rightly being spread over all the news allowed to come through regarding the operations. Fighting is going on along the whole front from Basel to Diest. The closer the contact comes between the two armies and the closer one gets to a decisive action the more one must expect to see an advantage gained at one point while ground is lost at another. That is only to be expected in the case of battles taking place over such immense fronts as those occupied by the great armies of modern times.

"To sum up, one may say that what is going on at our gates is not the only thing to be thought of. A strategic movement conceived with a well-defined object is not necessarily a retreat. The fighting which has taken place at



PRIEST ASSISTING THE WOUNDED AFTER THE BATTLE OF HOFSTADE.

[Daily Mirror.]

the front during the last few days has resulted in making the enemy more circumspect and in delaying his forward march, to the great advantage of the whole scheme of operations. There is no reason at the present time for letting oneself be hung up, thus playing into the hands of the Germans. That is the motive of the movements now being carried out. We are not beaten, far from it, but are making arrangements for beating the enemy in the best possible conditions. The public should, in this matter, place all trust in the commander of the Army and should remain calm and confident."

It has been asked why the French Army, resting upon its lines from Namur northwards, did not, by a forward movement, attempt to relieve the Belgian position. A considerable German force was already facing and engaging the French. The blow on the Belgians came so suddenly that there was scarcely time for French relieving forces to arrive. Further, there is every reason to believe that the French at this stage were not in sufficient force north of Namur to make such an advance possible. The main French armies were concentrated, not here, but further south. Even after the Belgian Field

Army had been defeated the French General Staff apparently believed that the advance into Belgium was little more than a feint made to take attention off the Alsace-Lorraine front. Believing this, it refused, until the danger to its own left flank was almost overwhelming, to alter its original plans.

Brussels, the Belgian capital, rested secure from the opening of the war in the conviction that the English would come to help it before the Germans could arrive, and that another Waterloo would be fought beyond the suburbs of the city with the same result as the battle 99 years before.

The General Staff issued reassuring bulletins. The Press fully supported the attempt to maintain the confidence of the people. There was little grumbling, and no signs of weakening. A fierce flame of patriotism had been kindled, and manifested itself among all classes. If devotion and self-sacrifice could have made up for lack of military training, it certainly would have been accomplished here. "This is a war for home and for faith—in the truest sense of the word a holy war," wrote one observer at Brussels at the time. "It has united all classes; it has



HOMELESS.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]



GERMAN TROOPS RESTING AFTER THE FIGHTING AT VISÉ.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]

made of the nation one man. The very clerks in the Government offices are giving their services voluntarily; the workmen lay telegraph wires, handle trains, perform all manner of services, in many cases without reward. In the country villages peasant women bring bread and beer for the soldiers, giving of their best freely. They scorn payment. And the poorest of the poor have contributed their pence gladly to the cause."

There could no longer be any ignoring the realities of the war, even had the people desired it. The city was now the great receiving home for the wounded from the front. Royal palaces, hotels, private houses, and public institutions were occupied by doctors and nurses, and steady processions of the wounded arrived either in specially equipped automobiles or by train. The contingents of disabled men were received often enough by vast crowds who stood bare-headed and bowing as a token of respect as the stretchers were borne by. The Queen led the Red Cross work, and women of every rank joined in the mission of pity and help for the victims of war.

Apart from the wounded, another army of war victims was beginning to pour into the city—refugees from the villages and towns destroyed by the advancing Germans. Many of them had nothing but what they stood up in. Others had baskets and bags containing all that was left of their worldly possessions. Mothers came along footsore with their children, well-dressed mothers and well-dressed children often enough, accustomed hitherto to a life of comfort, and now with their homes burned and their men-folk killed, penniless, not knowing

what to do, where to go, or where to obtain their next meal. Here were peasant women who told how their husbands and sons, venturing to resist the Uhlan outposts, had been promptly hanged from the nearest trees. Here were young lads who related how, in their villages, all the men had been seized as hostages, the priest and the doctor and the schoolmaster shot, and the remainder sent off they knew not where. Many of the tales were more dreadful still, tales which left the listener wondering whether grief had turned the brains of the people or whether the details which they passionately poured out of outrage and maiming and murder of women and children could be true.

Significant preparations were going on for the defence of the city. Much confidence was reposed in the civil guard, who could be seen drilling in the parks. Trenches were being dug, and barbed wire barricades put up out on the Chaussée de Louvain, in the Champs des Manœuvres, and beyond the cemeteries. The military authorities explained that these precautions were necessary because various scattered bands of Uhlans were about. They were being rounded up by the Belgians, and some of them might be driven back in such a way as to fall upon the city, which therefore must be protected against the danger of a sudden raid. Such a raid, it was added in an official announcement, was for that matter entirely improbable.

On Monday, August 17th, however, the real gravity of the situation became more evident. Refugees began to arrive in increased numbers. The Government considered it necessary to make a formal statement of the measures taken for local defence. At the same time significant



BELGIANS DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMES.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]

notices were put in the papers, warning civilians that they must not attempt to resist German troops if they arrived, but must stay in their houses, close their doors and windows, and do nothing which would give the enemy an excuse to shoot them down.

The Press was under the strictest censorship. A decree of the 17th limited the editions of the newspapers to two a day. Later the limitation was made still closer. Each paper, before publication, had to be submitted in proof to military censors, who cut out whatever they did not like. One paper did attempt to give some warning of what might happen. It was quickly brought to book.

By the afternoon of the 17th it became clear to the authorities that Brussels could not be held, and it was determined to transfer the seat of Government to Antwerp. The Official Journal attempted to minimize the importance of this news as much as it could in a notice published next morning. "Contrary to the provisions of the law of 1859," it said, "the Government has remained in Brussels during the phase of the war in which our Army was alone to oppose the enemy. Now, when the Armies of our friends are on our territory, the Government has judged that its seat may without inconvenience be transferred to Antwerp, in conformity with the wish of those who created that great fortified position.

"It is not that events are more grave than they have been hitherto. On the contrary, we are recording a new success of our troops supported by French cavalry. But as it is necessary that the transfer should be made normally and without the slightest interruption in the execution of the sovereign functions, the Government has considered it preferable to begin to transfer the services of the various Ministries while the families of the Ministers remain in the capital. Certain of the Ministers will therefore take up their residence in Antwerp, where the war services will be better placed while the Army is in the field. In deference to the desire of the Government, her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Princes will remove to the Palace at Antwerp. As long as the King remains among our valiant soldiers the establishment of the Royal Palace will continue to work in Brussels.

"At the request of the Government several statesmen holding the rank of Minister, especially those of the Opposition, will proceed temporarily to Antwerp."

Even before the announcement was made the military archives had been dispatched in motor wagons to Antwerp. State papers and treasure were also on their way.

During all these stormy scenes of impending tragedy Brussels had had its fill of emotion. Day by day during the previous fortnight crowds had

assembled and demonstrated in the streets on any excuse. Now it was the King riding to Parliament, riding on a war-horse in the uniform in which he was to take the field at the head of the Army. Now it was the Queen and the Royal children driving through the streets followed everywhere by the shouts and acclamations of the people. Now it was soldiers going forth to the south, the regulars, the volunteers, the special corps, all of them surrounded, not alone by their own friends, but by all who could gather to encourage them. Now the people found fresh cause for enthusiasm in the sight of the uniform of a French Army officer. That surely meant the arrival of the French troops! Now they cheered at the word that the English were coming.

The city had determined to maintain its good spirits and to show a brave front. What if the Germans were only forty miles or so to the south? The Allies would see to it that they came no farther.

In the early days, before the Press restrictions were enforced, limiting the number of editions issued each day, the newspapers appeared every hour and were bought eagerly. The streets were decked with flags. The "Brabançonne" was heard on all sides. At certain hours one might have imagined, were it not for

the processions of the wounded and the houses marked with the Red Cross, that Brussels was *en fête*.

Then the great display of enthusiasm cooled. The constantly repeated rumours of the arrival of foreign armies turned out all to be false. Day after day people got tired of hearing that the English were a mile or two away, or the French just to hand. "I received information this morning," wrote one experienced correspondent on the day after the outbreak of the war, "that British troops had landed and were on their way to the frontier to defend Belgian neutrality. I at once drove out to Laeken, through which suburb they must pass. There I learned that the news was premature. French regiments are alleged to have arrived at Namur. Others are marching into Belgium." Multiply such reports a thousandfold, add to them detailed accounts of the automobiles attached to the British Army, of the flower-decked guns, of the cheering and triumphant British troops, and of the countless armies of French infantry marching to the north-east, and the reader will have some idea of the reports which, never proving true, made the hearts of the Bruxellois sick.

Then there came something else to think of. Rumours of massacres at Visé racked with



GERMAN TROOPS HAVING THEIR MIDDAY MEAL IN THE GRANDE PLACE, BRUSSELS.

(Newspaper Illustrations.)



BELGIAN AIRMEN.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]

They have been of great use in locating the enemy's positions.

anxiety many of the people in the city who had friends and relatives at Visé. The stories of massacre and of looting to the south were no more impersonal to the folks of the capital than stories of the burning of Kentish villages or Northampton farms would be impersonal to Londoners. The authorities tried to suppress the accounts of a ruined country side, but the very attempt made them spread the more. Then the sight of the civil guards at drill around the town, the digging of entrenchments and the building of the barricades, were recognized even by the most optimistic as having a tremendous significance. When on the morning of Tuesday, August 18th, it was known that the Government had transferred itself to Antwerp, anxiety became acute.

Even as late as Tuesday night, however, many people in the city attempted to argue that all would yet be well. The French, it was said, were assuming the aggressive and were hunting the Uhlans out of the woods and back across the roads between Namur and Brussels. The Germans had changed their plan of campaign.

They had lost so much in attacking the Belgian Army that they would now abandon the northward move. "From a good source I have the news," wrote one correspondent on Tuesday night, "that the French generals have chosen their battle-ground and have the Germans now in such a position that they cannot avoid fighting a battle in which two-thirds of their northern forces must be engaged if it is to face the main body of the French which has been rolled up into Belgium." Obviously, if such a fight came, the Germans would be too fully engaged to make an immediate attempt to press on to the city.

Men told one another in the cafés and in the streets that the approach of the Germans formed part of the Allies' plan. They were being lured on to destruction. They had not yet secured a victory. Brussels was the bait, and in attempting to take it the foe were to be caught in a steel trap from which there would be no escape.

The stories of coming victory grew as they passed from mouth to mouth. Meanwhile the

people could hear the dull sounds of explosions in the distance as bridges and roadways were being blown up to check the German advance. In the suburbs the poorest inhabitants gave up everything they could in helping to build up the barricades against the Germans. "Hundreds of people," wrote one observer, "have sacrificed all their household furniture in the common cause. Beds, pianos, carts, boxes, baskets of earth—one child I saw filling up a basket from the gutter—are all piled up. Roads and bridges had been destroyed wholesale."

During Tuesday night and all Wednesday armies of refugees poured in. They came in family parties, small and great, old women of 80 helping along little toddling children, men and women in their prime with faces stricken with grief which told of ruined homes and broken prospects. Some sat down in the main streets on their little bundles, waiting on fate. Others, people of means, rushed through in their carriages to the coast. "On Wednesday," wrote one visitor, "the aristocracy from the surrounding châteaux began to come in in carts, motor-cars, and wagons. I saw women and children in every sort of clothes mixed up with household goods, many of which were quite without value in such a crisis, but which had

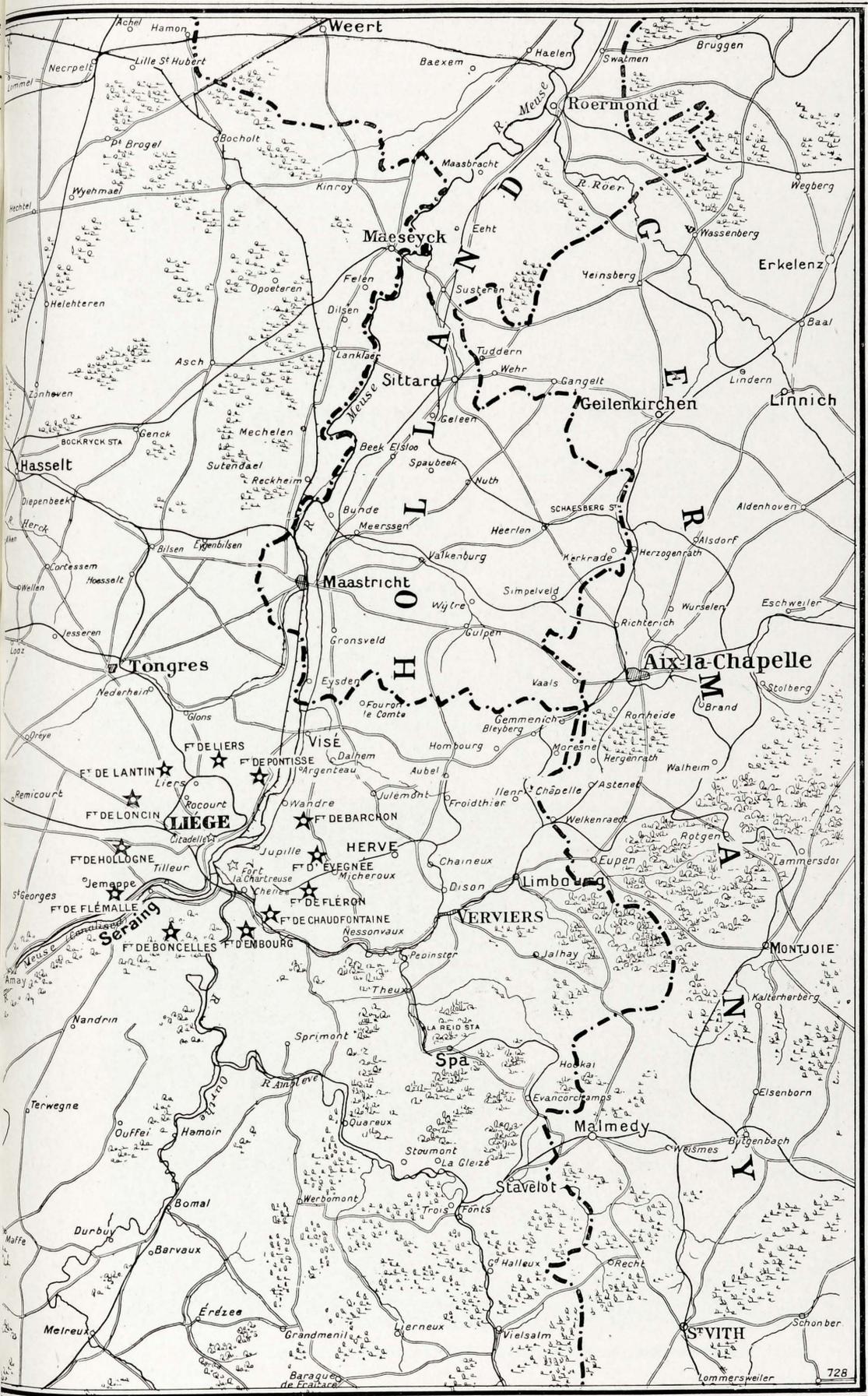
been snatched up at the moment of departure. These people with money did not stay a second in Brussels, but continued their wild peregrination towards the coast. Every motor, cart, and carriage was plastered with huge red crosses hastily improvised out of wallpaper, old petticoats, or any material which happened to come to hand. That evening thousands of terrified peasants poured down the Avenue du Régent, weeping and bemoaning their fate. They, poor souls, had no money and nowhere to go to. For the first time in their lives they found themselves homeless. It was a terrible sight." Every train going to the north was packed with people. Thousands of Bruxellois, caught in sudden fear, not knowing what to do, started tramping out on the road towards Ghent.

The great masses of the people, however, took the graver situation with comparative calmness, and most strangers who were present recorded their surprise, not so much at the crowds of refugees in the streets or the crowds of others seeking to escape from the city to the north, but at the vast number of men and women who went about their work quietly right up to the end. Even yet they did not give up all hopes of succour. But if the worst were to come, the



GERMAN INFANTRY IN THE SQUARE AT BRUSSELS.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]



GERMAN ADVANCE TO BRUSSELS.

German occupation of the city would be only momentary. They rested content in the rightness of their cause. It became generally known on the 19th that the Belgian Army had retired from Louvain towards Antwerp. It was reported at first that a considerable Belgian force still held the high wooded country between Louvain and Brussels, that it was well equipped with artillery, and that it could hold any attack back. These troops, it was added, would be still further reinforced, and would have as their reserve the much-advertised civil guard. But those at the head of affairs had no delusions. They knew very well that any effort to check the Germans at this stage could only result in more or less destruction to Brussels itself. There were those who yet advocated fighting to the last. They were in the minority, and cool advisers from neutral nations strongly urged the duty of not attempting an impossible task. To attempt a battle at the barricades would only mean bombardment of the city and street fighting, with all the horrors that street fighting entails. The wiser counsels prevailed, and it was resolved to allow the Germans to enter peacefully.

That night a proclamation was posted on the walls of Brussels. It was signed by M. Max, the Burgomaster, who in the anxious weeks that followed was to win high reputation by his

courage and common sense in dealing with the Germans, and read :—

Despite the heroic resistance of our troops, aided by the Allied armies, it is to be feared that the enemy may occupy Brussels. In the event of such an occurrence I rely on the population to remain calm. Avoid all panic. The laws of war forbid the enemy obtaining by force information relating to national defence. The inhabitants of Brussels have the right to refuse all such information.

As long as I am alive or a free agent I shall endeavour to protect the rights and dignity of my fellow-citizens. I pray you to render my task less difficult by abstaining from all hostile acts. Citizens, whatever befall, listen to your burgomaster. He will not betray you. Long live a free and independent Belgium! Long live Brussels!

On Thursday morning the Burgomaster went out in a motor-car, accompanied by his four sheriffs, to meet the German military commander. He was attired in his scarf of office. He was received with great brusqueness, bidden to remove his scarf, and then asked if he was prepared to surrender the city unconditionally. If not, it would be bombarded. He intimated that he had no other choice than to yield. He was thereupon informed that he would be held personally responsible for the good behaviour of the citizens, and that any acts of violence on the part of the people against the Germans would be visited on him and the other responsible heads of the city. The German troops would enter and occupy the place that day.



GERMAN TROOPS OUTSIDE THE BOURSE, BRUSSELS.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]



M. MAX, [Central News.
Burgomaster of Brussels.



COUNT VON ARNIM, [Stanleys.
who was Military Governor of Brussels.

The German Commander, General Sixtus von Arnim, issued the following proclamation, which was placarded in Brussels:—

German troops will pass through Brussels to-day and on the following days, and are obliged by circumstances to demand from the city lodging, food, and supplies. All these matters will be regularly arranged through the municipal authorities.

I expect the population to conform itself without resistance to these necessities of war, and in particular to commit no act of aggression against the safety of the troops, and promptly to furnish the supplies demanded.

In this case I give every guarantee for the preservation of the city and the safety of its inhabitants.

If, however, there should be, as there has unfortunately been elsewhere, any act of aggression against the soldiers, the burning of buildings, or explosions of any kind, I shall be compelled to take the severest measures.

The General Commanding the Army Corps,
SIXTUS VON ARNIM.

During the morning quiet crowds assembled in the main streets in the heart of the capital. No one knew quite what to expect. Every one was drawn by curiosity to see the arrival of the invader. It was told that the Germans were

already outside in great force on the roads to Waterloo, to Louvain, and to Tervueren.

The German General Staff had evidently ordered that the entry into Brussels was to be made as effective as possible. In place of parading the thinned ranks of the regiments that had fought so hard on the road from Liège, a fresh Army Corps was brought up. The people of Brussels expected to see exhausted and battle-worn soldiers—men bearing scars and wounds, with torn uniforms and depleted ranks. The reality was very different.

Soon after 2 in the afternoon the distant sound of artillery fire proclaimed the approach of the Germans. Then the sound of music could be heard, and the advance guards of the triumphant Army appeared. At the head rode a Prussian general, described by onlookers as “a swarthy, black-moustached, ill-natured brute, dressed in khaki-grey.” Had he been Apollo himself his looks would scarce have pleased the people of Brussels that day. Every

regiment, infantry or cavalry, had its band, and the music of the instruments was broken by the singing by the soldiers of "Die Wacht am Rhein" and "Deutschland über Alles." The troops were fresh and marched as though on parade. Their uniforms were new, their equipment undamaged, and their military *élan* such as to arouse the unwilling admiration of the onlookers. The long procession of troops was estimated to number 40,000. Every branch of the German service was represented. One part was a procession of a hundred motor-cars with machine-guns mounted on them. There was a complete siege train. The whole Army was dressed in one colour—a greenish grey. The very guns and the pontoon bridges and the equipment of the sappers were all grey. It was the war dress of Germany.

The Army moved down the Chaussée de Louvain into the Grands Boulevards up in the direction of the Gare du Nord. As they reached the main section of the route the word of command broke out and the infantry instantly broke into the famous German goose-step. It was a dramatic touch and it had its effect.

The people watched and wondered and feared.

"Towards the centre of the city," wrote the special correspondent of *The Times*, "the crowds had gathered on the pavements ten and twelve deep. In stony silence they watched the German soldiers pass; the children appeared interested in the wonderful spectacle, women trembled and whispered beneath their breath, old men and men too young for the Belgian colours stood white as ghosts and speechless with anger."

The troops quickly took possession of various strategic points in the city. All fears of immediate massacre were set at rest. The soldiers, so far from plundering the people, seemed anxious to prove the German power and prosperity by their display of abundance of money and their willingness to spend it. M. Max, the Burgomaster, was still held responsible for much of the routine work of local administration. The Germans appointed their own Civil Governor, who was the supreme authority. One of the first demands of the Germans when they had taken control was for an indemnity of eight million pounds as a war levy. This demand the Burgomaster informed them could not be complied with, as the city's money had been sent away to Antwerp.



A COMMON SIGHT IN DISTRESSED BELGIUM:
Villagers flying from the approaching Germans.

[Newspaper Illustrations]



DESTITUTE BELGIANS.

They came from the villages around Malines before the bombardment.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]

With the German entry into Brussels the first stage of the war came to an end. The Belgians had done their work well. They had succeeded in holding up the German advance in unexpected fashion. They had given France time to complete the mobilization of her forces, and England opportunity to land her completely equipped Expeditionary Force in France. The war was now to assume another aspect. In place of the fighting of

comparatively small forces along limited fronts in Belgium, there was to be direct conflict between the big armies of France backed by the English against the forces of Germany, first on the Belgian frontier and then on French soil. Germany had made ready for her great blow. The blow was now about to be struck, to use the characteristic phrase of the German General Staff, "like a thunderbolt."

