

THE ROMANCE OF WAR

CHAPTER XVII

THE ROMANCE OF WAR

PETROGRAD,

November 21, 1914.

IN the early days of August Germany declared war against Russia. The Kaiser, dressed in a resplendent uniform, made an address from the balcony of his Imperial Palace in Berlin. Frantic crowds, wild with the hysteria of the moment, cheered madly for war. Men threw their hats in the air and embraced each other joyously just as though some great blessing had befallen their nation. Berlin seethed with enthusiasm, and wherever the great War Lord, in his motor-car with his gilded chauffeur, appeared, he was cheered to the echo. The local papers announced the triumphal departure of the city garrison for the front. There seemed then nothing to mar the picture of a short and glorious campaign that in every German mind was to raise the Fatherland to a pinnacle of power never before even dreamed of.

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In Paris almost similar scenes were enacted. The French gave way to unrestrained exultation. The war of redemption was at hand, the day of vengeance for which France had waited for a generation had dawned. The grim and sinister guns that left Paris for the front were smothered in wreaths and garlands of roses, which all but concealed the ugly muzzles which were formed but for the utterance of messages of death. The departing infantry left Paris with the echoes of cheers still ringing in their ears. Thus did France take up her burden.

In Petrograd the people took it more quietly, but none the less deeply. Three hundred thousand Russians gathered in the square before the Winter Palace, and upon their knees chanted the National Anthem of their race. The Nevsky Prospekt shook with the tramp of marching feet and the rumble of the batteries going to the battlefield. Men, women and children fought for places near the soldiery in its march to the station. Brass bands blared out the glory of Russia. Waving standards, borne by proudly marching colour-sergeants, were greeted with roars of enthusiastic cheering.

In Vienna the aged Emperor of the Dual Monarchy was crowned with the expression of popular approval. In Serbia, Japan, and even phlegmatic England, the coming of war found analogous

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signs of eagerness and approbation. From every capital affected by the declarations of hostilities came photographs of crowds "cheering for war." The various monarchs who were directly or indirectly responsible for it were all national heroes on the instant. Everywhere we saw and heard the same story. Bands, eager crowds, troops idolized, waving standards, fervent speeches and denunciations. It was the one brief period in which all Europe worshipped for an instant at the shrine of carnage, an altar disguised in bunting and garlands before which, with eyes blinded to the future miseries, the races of the world forgot the price and became dizzy with joy. The romance of war was in the heart of every man. There is another side of the picture. Let us look at it.

I

There is a beautiful city in Galicia called Lemberg. Among its imposing public buildings there is none finer than the gigantic railway station, whose classic lines and symmetrical proportions speak of the masterhand and of an architect who builded a monument to the glory of his imperial and royal master, whose name—Franz Joseph—is emblazoned in gilded letters above the impressive entrance. Every traveller in Galicia will recall the luxurious equipment of this modern

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and magnificently appointed edifice. Let us take a glance at it as I saw it a few weeks ago.

From each of the dozen platforms a marble stairway leads down to a transverse tunnel by which one enters into the dépôt itself. The system is identical with that of the New York Central station at Albany, New York. In the flickering arc lights of the train-shed—it was late at night that I passed through—there were rows upon rows of hospital cars and freight cars, on each of which a huge red cross had been hurriedly painted. With the exception of one long train, loaded with canvas-covered guns, there was nothing else visible in the shed. The air above was cool and fresh in the late autumn night. To breathe it was exhilaration. One paused for a moment at the head of the stairway from which came the flow of dead air such as one notices at the mouth of a mine. In the transverse tunnel, the lifelessness of it was more apparent, but it was forgotten in the tramping feet of men bearing stretchers from another track beyond.

We stood back a moment or two to allow a series of sad objects to pass, and then, taking advantage of a break in the procession, we slipped into the great dépôt between a stretcher and two men who carried between them a blue-coated object with head on breast and arms swaying helplessly. Once inside



Villagers in Poland searching amongst the Ruins of their Homes.

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the station one caught one's breath. The air, laden with anæsthetics, disinfectants, and the subtle smell of dried blood and unwashed humanity, seemed incapable of nourishing the blood within one's lungs. But the sights within drove all else from one's consciousness. The great hall within was set so thick with stretchers, that it was only possible to pass through it by picking one's way gingerly and stepping over silent forms. And such objects as these ghastly litters contained! At this time the fighting was going forward on the San and round Przemyśl, and the wounded had come directly from the firing line and trenches with only the first field dressings.

Every form of horror that human ingenuity had designed for shell and shrapnel to create was here as an evidence of the inventors' success. Here a man with trousers ripped from his waist down, and swathed in deep-dyed bandages from hip to knee, showed where a fragment of a shell had done its work. Near by lay a huge creature whose purple bandages failed to conceal a great raw hole where a face had been. Others, with glazing eyes, looked dully through and beyond us, while the slow and laboured breath told the story of life ebbing slowly away from a wound in some vital organ. Across the hall, in the blaze of a dozen arcs, hurriedly strung to enable

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the surgeon to do his task, is the great first-class dining-room. On each of three operating tables lies a huge giant half stripped, under the knife of the skilful surgeon, who, with haggard face but steady hand, moves rapidly but surely about his work, actually stepping over stretchers that wait their turn. Huge baskets are rapidly filling with bushels of blood-stained bandages; here and there a hand neatly cut off, or the stump of a severed leg, among the Red Cross wrappings tells of the surgeon's kind of work.

We linger only a moment in the flicker of the white arc lamps, and push on through the hallway into the great waiting-room. The ticket windows are now closed. The benches have been removed to make room. There is standing room only, and hardly that. Every available inch not covered by a stretcher, is occupied by a soldier, whose wounded hand, arm, or bandaged head is sufficiently slight enough to keep him on his feet, but still bad enough to make a re-dressing necessary as early as the rush upon the surgeon's time will make possible. I have said there were three doctors in one dining-room. There are two other dining-rooms, and in each is a similar scene. Perhaps the reader may conclude that this dreadful scene spells poor organization. Quite the contrary.

The Russians are achieving wonders. In Lem-

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berg during the war there have been to date, including Austrians (who form perhaps the major part), more than a hundred thousand wounded. The night I speak of there had come in a single block, three thousand wounded, including those of both sides. What we see is merely the first shock of the avalanche from the battlefield. Return at daylight (I have been in the ghastly edifice at almost all hours of the day and night) and there is not a soldier or a wounded man left. Sleepy attendants are cleaning up, and tired surgeons and nurses have either gone or are just packing up after their night's work. The wounded that we saw a little earlier are already in clean beds. What human love and sympathy and care can do is now being done. It is sad. It is terrible. But it is war. "Where," one asks oneself, "is the romance of it all? Are these the same men who a month ago departed from Vienna and Petrograd with music and amidst cheers?" No cheers now. Eyes that shone with the glitter of excitement and the approbation of fellow-citizens who speeded them to battle are now dull with pain or sad with apprehension of the future. Yet the sacrifice is one of necessity. The Russians accept it. They believe in their cause. It is part of the day's work. The *omelette* that Napoleon talked of is being made. They are

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the eggs. What does it matter! The balance of power in Europe cries for adjustment!

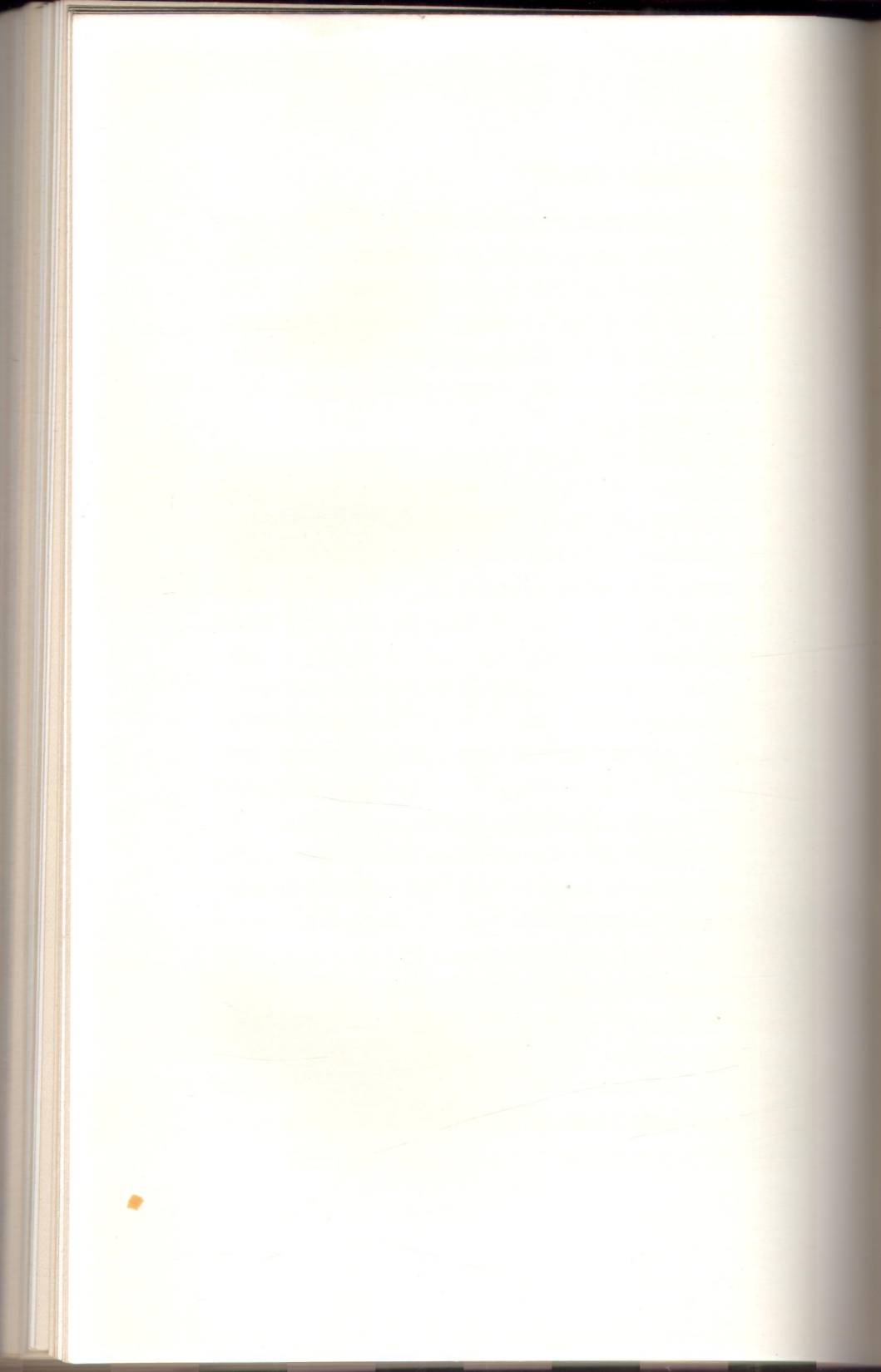
II

Let us have another look at war and what it spells.

We are in Poland now. It has been a beautiful autumn day, and the sun has set over the horizon to the west in a great red glory. It is a lovely country dotted with villages, with great, white, macadam roads lined with avenues of trees stretching in long, white tangents from village to village. Surely twilight, of all hours of the day, is the supreme moment of peace on earth and goodwill to men. With all nature serene and the afterglow of departing day steeping all in quiet and tranquillity, it is impossible to realize that the lust of killing can be in any human heart. In the fading light we halt in the street of what this morning was a prosperous little village. Let us pause by the roadside and have a look at what is about us. Through the main street in the gloaming, their figures already dimly silhouetted against the western sky, there passes an interminable procession of the neutral-tinted uniforms of Russian soldiers. Their bayonets twinkle feebly in the dim light, and their tired faces are almost undistinguishable.



Russian Soldiers Entrenching (Poland).



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Ever and anon their ranks scatter to right and left, to permit the passage of the wagons bearing wounded, who are moving and jolting to the rear; some moaning softly, others silent and stern, with passionless eyes gazing straight into the sky as they lie upon their backs in the crude conveyances.

There has been a battle here to-day. It was one of the many rearguard actions of the Germans in their hurried flight from Warsaw. The Russians, moving forward with an impetuosity that would not be denied, were pushing close on to their transport and their ammunition train. For a day, a few devoted regiments of the retreating hosts had been thrown into the breach, to stem the tide long enough to permit the enemy to get away with his impedimenta. Unfortunately for this wretched little village, the Germans made a stand here on their retreat. What was the answer? A few quickly spoken words from an officer on the eastern hills a few kilometres away. Eight guns are snapped off their limbers, ranges are called sharply, and in ten minutes the village which shelters the retreating troops is a heap of ruins, and the enemy are once more stringing out to the west down the road, followed by the shrapnel until they have passed over the hills and are out of range.

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The troops we see passing forward in the twilight are reserves pushing forward to keep up with the Russian advance, which hours ago raced through here on the very heels of the retiring enemy. Over in the woods a few hundred yards away, are the still warm bodies of the Germans, who, true to discipline and the commands of their officers, patiently awaited under a deadly fire for the bayonets of the Russians. To-morrow the scrupulous Russian will bury the bodies and erect a cross above the grave with a respectful inscription, and the incident in the wood will have been closed. There are only a few hundred dead. What does that amount to in a war where there are millions engaged!

We forget ourselves as we turn back to the village. The simple people, who have spent their lives here until yesterday, are returning now. They are wandering about aimlessly, dazed by the transformation effected in a few hours.

Here is a cottage the walls of which are still standing. Even the doorway is intact though the door itself hangs drunkenly on a single hinge. The family horse, torn open by a shrapnel shell, lies with his head stretched across the sill. In the back yard half a dozen cows are gazing reflectively at a heap of ashes where their shed once stood. In wonderment they chew their cud and expectantly await the coming of some one to empty

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their full udders. No one, I think, will come. The mother sits on an overturned tub in the yard, a baby at her breast and two little children clinging to her skirts. She is sobbing quietly. Where is her husband? Perhaps he lingered too long, or took refuge in the shell-swept wood. He too is but an incident in the catastrophe, a drop in the bucket of misery.

The next cottage presents more signs of hope. Nothing stands but the chimney, but here at least we see signs of life. A fire has been kindled on the hearthstone, and in its red flicker the vigorous figure of a woman is moving about preparing some kind of meal for three little children who sit on the doorstep without. A man with a rake is pulling over the ashes. Here is a family that will soon re-establish itself. Reliance and hope speak everywhere. For them we need not worry.

Across the street is a heap of ashes. Not even a chimney remains. Under a tree a man is standing. He is holding a crying child in his arms. His eyes look at us dully and without expression. It is growing dark now, and the details are fading slowly from our sight. The day is now over, and we drive back thirty kilometres to our headquarters. Already we hear of a greater conflict elsewhere, and turn in for the night and go to sleep as quickly as we can, for in the morn-

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ing we are to motor 140 kilometres to another front.

But what we have seen is nothing wanton. It is simply war. The Germans made a stand. The Russians drove them out. Everything was legitimate. The village was in the way; there was no other resource. Thousands of other villages in every theatre of war can tell the same story.

I wonder if the cheering crowds in Unter den Linden in Berlin, the eager throngs that marched through the Graben in Vienna, thought of this when they howled aloud for war, and became drunk with the romance of it?

III

One more glimpse and I have finished.

There was a battle only a week or so ago at Kielce. Probably the reader never even heard of such a place, and perhaps the battle was so small in the huge perspective of what is now the order of the day in Europe, that its echo never reached England or America at all. Still in any other war it would have been worth writing about.

The front was twenty kilometres across, and on both sides perhaps nearly 100,000 men were engaged. It was a rearguard action, and lasted but a few hours. The Austrians, as usual in this retreat towards the south-west, were

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left to hold the rear. Their centre was in a village ten kilometres east of Kielce. It was an ideal position to hold, with a walled churchyard as its apex, with rifle pits, gun positions and trenches protecting its flanks. Here, no doubt, the enemy felt sure of holding the Russians for several days.

But even we who have been with the army for a month, and are in sympathy with it, have been surprised by the momentum, inspired by *moral* and engendered of organization fulfilled, that it has attained. The advance of the Czar's soldiers, filled with confidence from battles won at Ivangrod, Augustow and Radom, never waited here for conventional operations, but the first wave of the advance took this central point in a night attack with the bayonet. They even swept over the loopholed wall of the churchyard, like the waves of the sea over the castles of sand that a child has erected on the beach, before the incoming tide. With the centre carried by storm, and the flanks already enveloped, the whole line crumpled up; and once more the flood of Russians poured on the wake of the retreating enemy like impounded water in a reservoir when the dam gives way.

The Russians were proud of this churchyard enterprise, as well they might be. So we journeyed over to this pivotal point to have a look at it.

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It was a quaint little village that clustered about cross-roads. In the very centre was the church and its walled yard, which hemmed in an ancient graveyard whose mouldering tombstones showed their age. The only sound here to break the stillness of the morning was the rumble and clatter of ammunition caissons, each with six horses to the team, that in an endless line were moving to the south-east where the distant rumble of artillery told that our advance was again pressing the retreating columns of the Dual Alliance. The whole churchyard was littered with the equipment of fallen soldiers. Guns, haversacks, bloody bandages and coagulated blood were scattered promiscuously among the graves. The villagers, under the directions of the Russians, were already mobilizing the dead. Creaking carts of the peasantry had been pressed into the service, and were plodding about the fields in all directions, picking up the dead and bringing them into the town, where they were accumulating in rows, grey-coated Russian beside blue-clad Austrian. The children ran excitedly about the street inspecting each hideous corpse, and screaming with excited curiosity at every fresh horror.

On the outskirts of the village huge trenches were being digged, beside which the dead were ranged in crowds. Phlegmatic peasants drove up with wagonloads of stiffened corpses, bloody



A Siberian Pony in Difficulties.



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faces leering gruesomely with unseeing eyes from the back of the carts, with here and there an arm or a leg sticking rigidly out of the mass. Like bits of pig-iron they are dumped out on the grass. Here a Russian with face half gone, grimaces horribly with one glassy eye at a beautiful Austrian boy whose pallid face looks tranquilly into his; the hand, clutched in the rigour of death at the left breast, shows that he fell without a struggle, while the half-smile on his youthful mouth bespeaks the fact that he at least never knew what hit him.

A little beyond at a wayside cross is another heap of dead. One looks at them and shudders at the horrors that shell fragments can make out of what once was a man. But as we look there come those whose duty it is to bury them. Good men, these peasants, no doubt, but surely not sensitive. As they begin to disentangle the bodies and pull them toward the grave by one leg, with passionless face bobbing in the dirt behind, one turns sadly away. This, too, is but an incident.

Did the girls of Vienna, when they cheered this headless corpse, then a strong youth in the flush of early manhood, foresee this finish? Did the dainty hands that placed the wreaths upon the muzzles of the guns that lumbered to the front, realize the character of the work that those

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metal mouths were designed to fulfil? What do the cheers, the bands, the waving standards mean now? Where is the romance?

Sherman spoke well when he said at Atlanta, "The essence of war is cruelty." What we see daily is decent warfare. Is it cruel? Perhaps, but it is war, and without it there could be no victories gained nor empire built. It puzzles the imagination and distorts the perspective, but it must be accepted—and forgotten, if possible.

WARSAW DURING THE SECOND
GERMAN ADVANCE

WILLIAM THE FIRST
ROMAN KING

CHAPTER XVIII
WARSAW DURING THE SECOND
GERMAN ADVANCE

WARSAW, POLAND,
December 15, 1914.

WHEN the Germans left this region in October and we had accompanied them in their retirement as far west as Skierniewice and as far south as Kielce, there were many of us who were so ignorant of the German determination to keep everlastingly at the game over here as to believe that they had abandoned Poland for good. True, as I have already stated, I was in Kielce on November 3, the very day that the enemy retired before our advance, a number of the inhabitants entertained me with the remarks of the German soldiers to the effect that the Germans were only leaving to suit their own convenience and would be back when the cold weather with frozen roads and rivers would make campaigning easier for them. But I put this down at the time as stories told by the German officers to their men to keep them from being discouraged.

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In the light of what followed, and the much greater scale of the second invasion, we can only conclude that what we took to be heavy fighting in October was in comparison but a mere reconnaissance. Even when the second movement started, many in Russia felt that it was only a demonstration to relieve the pressure on Cracow and the ever impending menace of the Silesian invasion ; but after Lodz was abandoned and we heard reports of many army corps pouring in on this front from Germany, we began to realize that the Polish theatre was at last to be the big news centre for some months to come. The likelihood of this was increased by the fact that the fighting in the West had settled down to trench warfare, and had come to an approximate deadlock, calculated to last at least till the spring.

One by one the correspondents who had been marking time in Petrograd, began to slip quietly away, and by the middle of December the lobby of the Bristol Hotel here had become the rendezvous of all the lost journalists in Russia. Percival Gibbon, the correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*, has likened Warsaw in 1914 to Brussels in 1815, and his comparison is not inapt.

Here in a first-class hotel, which is as fine as any in Europe, one finds the great news centre



Correspondents' Car in Difficulties: Russian Soldiers to the Rescue.

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of this whole war. I am told that when the war started, the proprietors of this establishment thought of closing it up for fear of lack of trade; but as a matter of fact, from the day of the first German advance it has been difficult to get a room here at all, so full is the town of officers and those whose business is ever upon the threshold of war. In the great luxurious lobby that six months ago was given over almost entirely to groups of tourists and pleasure seekers, one sees now hardly a civilian all day long. All day long the hotel is filled with a moving throng of officers representing every branch of the Russian service. Since the fighting has settled down to prolonged operations west of us, hundreds of the wives and women relatives of the officers have come down here, and one can go a long way and find no gayer scene of brightness and life than the lobby and corridors of the hotel. It is hard to realize that the front where hundreds of thousands of men are facing each other in desperate fighting is only thirty miles away.

But to understand that war is a reality, one has only to step out into the street. For there, from morning until night, is the constant evidence that Warsaw is the base, and also the great artery through which flows the transport of the enormous army that is just to the west of us. All day and

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all night the interminable line of transport carts drags past the hotel on its way to the front. Batteries, hundreds upon hundreds of caissons, bearing shrapnel and ammunition, move slowly through the streets. A dozen times a day one meets battalions and regiments of new units of troops plodding steadily through the town, the great patient soldiers trudging along through the snow towards the trenches where they, too, are going to take up their place in Russia's greatest war.

In spite of the fact that the front is so near, it is very difficult to gather direct information of what is going on from day to day. I have never, in a somewhat varied experience, found any place where more false reports and misinformation circulated at par than here in Warsaw. Even Chefoo in the Manchurian campaign, which up to that time had the record for inaccuracies, must take second place to Warsaw. Hardly a day passes in which one is not told with the greatest conviction by one and another stories to the effect that the Germans have broken our line, are already at Blonie (eighteen miles away), that Warsaw will be evacuated instantly, and I know not what other wild tales. There is little doubt that the enormous population of Jews here is for the most part German in its sympathies, and that probably these falsehoods started from Hebrew sources.

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But even the best informed and the most serious minded are more than half the time misled as to what is actually going on. Though the news from almost every front is actually in this hotel within twenty-four hours of its occurrence, it is all but impossible to get it pieced together so as to make a consistent whole. The younger officers who will talk, know nothing about the situation save in the immediate vicinity in which they have themselves been engaged. The front is so extended, and there are so many thousand details, that the report of a single individual who has come from the front line is about as informing as to the whole perspective as the view-point of a man whose nose is two feet from a stone wall. I find that even some of the officers are not informed as to which corps flank their own organizations, while the lower generals have only the vaguest ideas as to operations that are going on ten miles away. The man who comes in from a position where there has been a snappy action during the day can see only the results that took place in his particular trench. If his battalion repulsed the Germans, he brings in word that the Germans made a general assault all along the line; and in his heart he believes that his regiment has been the centre of one of the greatest actions in the world's history.

It is hard for any who go through an action where half their neighbours are killed or wounded,

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to realize that even the wiping out of his whole regiment or brigade is but a detail of the war, and that the fight which he took to be on so gigantic a scale was in reality, but a skirmish relatively. Thus it is that we get from day to day reports of great victories and great defeats from men who are absolutely sincere and intelligent as well. It is all but impossible in operations so large to get a perspective at all, and it is doubtful if even the staff gets more than a very vague idea of what has happened. The inaccuracies as to actual events are, however, small in comparison with unfounded general information. Reports of losses are wide of the truth by hundreds per cent. A hundred dead have easily been increased to a thousand by the time the report gets here, and probably more when it gets to Petrograd. If the Germans get a new army corps over here, we hear at once that they are withdrawing the bulk of their troops from the West front, and I sincerely believe that the majority of the plain soldiers over here think that they are fighting the greater part of the German army. If the Germans had here half what they are credited with, they would long since have had Warsaw, and by this time have been well on their way towards Petrograd, if they had coveted that city.

As for the number and the size of guns credited to the Germans, there is no limit to

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the imagination which describes them. If a shrapnel bursts near one of the Red Cross assistants, he immediately concludes that it is at least a 10-inch projectile; and if he sees a lot of them burst, the story circulates here next day that more than half of the German guns are of the largest type. Even the younger Russian officers delight in magnifying the artillery of the enemy. One told me the other day that a certain shell hole that we were examining was made by a 42-centimetre shell, when it certainly was nothing more important than the projectile from a 4'7. It may be imagined, then, how difficult it becomes for the correspondent to piece together the thousand fragments of news and get anything like a true estimate of the situation taken as a whole. If one stays in Warsaw, one runs the risk of being absolutely led astray; and when one manages to get out to the front itself, all perspective is entirely lost.

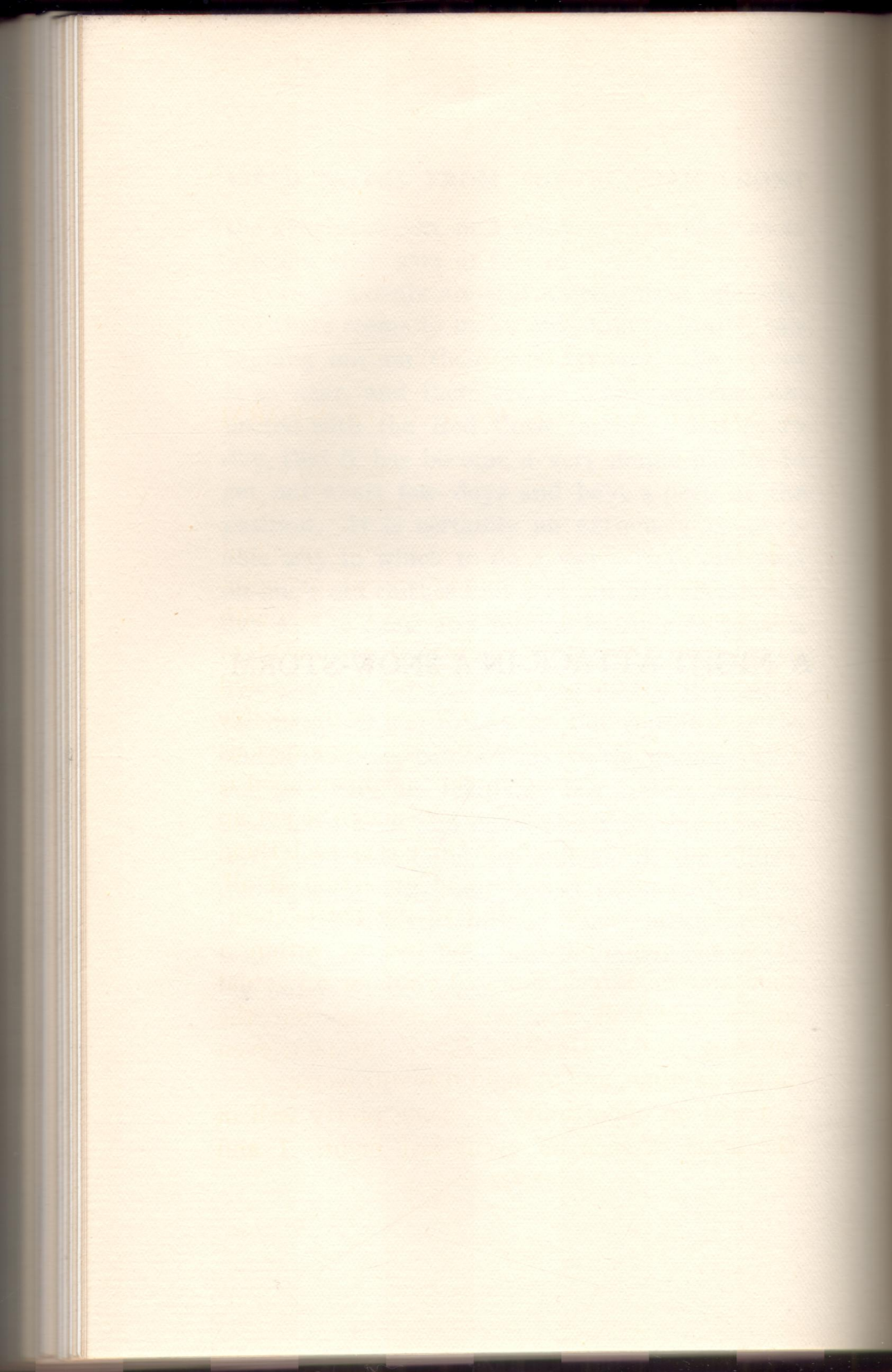
It is possible, however, to keep a rough check on troops moving through, and the numbers of wounded that are coming back, and one can obtain by diligent research from many quarters an approximation of the Russian line as it varies from day to day. From the wounded it is difficult to get very much, for almost without exception they are so confused with the details of their own experiences, that they know nothing at all of

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the general action, and many are not clear as to whether they won or lost it.

Correspondents are still unrecognized officially, but there seems to be no objection to individuals slipping out on their own account. The front is so near, and there are so many persons connected with the Red Cross motoring out every day, that it has become a very simple matter to get out every few days and have a peep at the position. It is certainly an extremely comfortable way in which to do a war. Here one puts on one's old clothes and goes out and spends the day at the front and returns in time to have a clean-up and dinner at a fashionable restaurant. The nearness of the positions makes it possible for many officers to get in, but considering the size of the army before Warsaw, the numbers that one sees here are relatively few. Most vigorous rules have been laid down about officers here off duty, and this hotel, as well as all the others, undergoes a checking process twice daily to see if any officers are shirking their duties at the front in order to have a little amusement in the big hotels at the base.

A NIGHT ATTACK IN A SNOW-STORM



CHAPTER XIX

A NIGHT ATTACK IN A SNOW-STORM

Dated : GUZOW, POLAND,

January 6, 1915.

THE good old days when a war correspondent could go out and stand on a hill and actually see infantry and cavalry advancing, and with his glasses observe the genuine development of an action, are gone for ever. Even if one could come and go as one pleased, it would be impossible to see the things that the reader at home is anxious to hear about. Poland in this neighbourhood is flat, and unless one is fortunate enough to get up in an aeroplane or a balloon there is no such thing as really seeing the details of an action at all, even though one be all but in the battle itself. It seems incredible that one can be within a thousand or fifteen hundred yards of an actual attack and still see almost nothing but the bursting shells. However, this is the fact, even in the daytime, and at night it is still worse.

I had an opportunity of being pretty well in the heart of such an event last night. I and

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Granville Fortescue, the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, accepted the invitation of a gentleman in the Red Cross to run out with him from Warsaw and have a look at some of the field hospitals in which he was actively interested. Following the general situation from Warsaw becomes rather a bore, and so we gladly accepted his offer, and about eight o'clock on the Russian Christmas Eve we found ourselves just finishing a simple meal, in a little room in one of the improvised hospitals. Across the hall from where we sat some tired nurses were cleaning up the operating room, and piling bloody bandages into a big basket. The last of the day's wounded had been attended to, and were already tucked in the straw in a great shed across the street, where they were to spend the night before moving back toward the big Warsaw hospitals.

"Shall we make a visit to the positions?" asked our Red Cross friend. Both Fortescue and myself had for a week been desirous of getting into the first line trenches in order to form some accurate estimate as to the condition of the Russian soldiers, and now, on the eve of the Russian Christmas, seemed an exceptionally fortunate time in which to make them a call. As we came out into the street of the quaint little Polish village it was snowing. Not a blustering, windy snow-storm, but that quiet, gentle unassuming kind of



A Russian Soldier writing Home from the Trenches.

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snow that comes drifting down aimlessly hour after hour, and by morning leaves a white blanket inches deep over everything. Our friend had provided a cart with one weary horse, and into this we climbed, and started westward out of the village. The night was as quiet and serene as the picture on a Christmas card. From the front came not a sound to break the stillness. Once out on the main road we came upon the interminable transport which fills every highway and byway by day and by night. Long strings of artillery caissons, bearing shrapnel as Christmas gifts for the Germans, plodded along through the falling snow, the weary drivers nodding in their saddles, while the soldiers on the caisson lay crossways on the limber, their feet hanging limply over one end. The whole transport seems to move intuitively at night with half the drivers sleeping in their seats.

For more than an hour we drove down one of the great avenues of trees that line nearly all the main arteries of travel in this country. Then we turned off across a field, and for another half hour zigzagged about over a route which seemed familiar enough to our guide, but which to us was as planless as the banks of Newfoundland in a fog. Finally, after driving for nearly two hours, we brought up at a bank of a small creek. With the flashes of a pocket electric lamp our guide dis-

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covered the ford, and we drove in—and stuck fast. It was as still as death, with only our voices and the soft ripple of water in the little stream to break the silence. The snow was still falling, and our coats and hats were already white. While we were trying to tease our patient little horse to make one more effort to get us out of the river, there came a sullen boom, from far off to the west. Then a long way off another and another and another. “Ha,” said our guide, “the German guns. We are in luck. They may be planning an attack.”

Even as he spoke there came a quick red light to our left through the haze of snow, and “Bang” said the sharp incisive little field gun hidden somewhere over there in the darkness. “Bang, bang, bang,” said two or three brothers in unison. Almost simultaneously a second battery over on our right came into action with a succession of rapid reports that shook the air. Our little horse made an extraordinary effort, due to the excitement of the firing perhaps, and we got up on the river’s bank once more. As we stood in the road there came an earth-shaking crash, and a flash as of lightning from our rear, and a six-inch shell from one of our big batteries a mile or more behind screamed overhead. We heard its melancholy wail fade away, and then a long way off the sullen boom of its explosion. A sudden contagion of

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fire seemed to sweep the countryside, and in an instant the still night was torn and shattered by the crash of artillery, the whine of shell, and reverberations of heavy explosions. The small German guns now broke loose, and we could plainly see where our own trenches were located, from the quick, hateful jagged flashes of the bursting shrapnel above them.

We climbed into our cart and pushed on toward the front as rapidly as possible. For ten minutes the thunder of the artillery shook the air ; and then puncturing the greater tumult came the sharp little crack of a rifle, followed by a series of reports like a pack of fire-crackers exploding. Then it seemed as though some one had thrown a thousand packs of crackers into the fire. The artillery redoubled its rapidity of fire, and to our right front a machine gun came into action ; then another just before us, and then a whole series off to the left, until it was impossible to pick out any single piece from the confusion of noise. The flash of the guns and the breaking of shells gave a light like that of a pale moon, and we could clearly see the road ahead of us.

Leaving our cart and patient pony, we pushed forward on foot toward the trenches. Our way led across a field, and then through the fringe of a little grove of Christmas trees. In the field the snow was deep, and we kept stepping into

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holes and going headfirst into drifts. The crackle of musketry, the monotonous hammer of machine guns, the steady roar of the artillery around us and the whine of shells above us, still continued. After stumbling about in the snow for half an hour, our party came to a halt. The attack which seemed not above a thousand yards before us was still going on. Rockets from the German positions soared on high, and burst with a great white light which we could see even through the snow. Somewhere some one had a searchlight, for we could see its great long finger sweeping here and there across the sky. The noise and tumult continued, but we did not go farther. Our guide thought that it would be impossible in view of the attack, for us to get into the trenches, and I believe he was not sure of the way in the dark. So we turned back, and in half an hour were back at the first dressing station.

Each soldier has his first-aid package, and somehow or other they manage to care for themselves and each other in the trenches with such assistance as the busy doctor in the first line can give. Thence they come back to the dressing station, where their rough field dressings are removed, and better ones put on. They are again moved back one link in the chain, where, as at Guzow, there is an operating table and complete surgical equipment for the more imperative cases.

THE RUSSIAN FRONT

As we stumbled into the little hut from out of the falling snow in the fields, the wounded were already beginning to arrive. A half-dozen carts with canvas tops, like the old American prairie schooners, were already standing before the door; and sleepy soldiers were stumbling about in the dark helping to get the wounded out of the carts and into the little stuffy hut, where in the dull light of oil lamps, the great patient Russian soldiers, still in their bloodstained bandages and wet and dirty from the trenches, were waiting for treatment. And still from without came the noise and tumult and clatter of the armies celebrating Christmas Eve, the day of "Peace on earth, goodwill to men."

It soon became obvious that we could get no farther toward the front that night, and a little after midnight we started back toward Guzow in our little cart. After we had been on the road a short time the firing began to slow up, and then gradually ceased entirely, save for an occasional spasmodic crash from a field gun, or the heavier boom of a big howitzer that still kept up the fight as though unwilling to go to sleep at all, even as a big dog bays and bays long into the night and refuses to be quieted.

We took a new road home, with the result that we were soon off any road at all and plodding about in the fields. A mile or more from the

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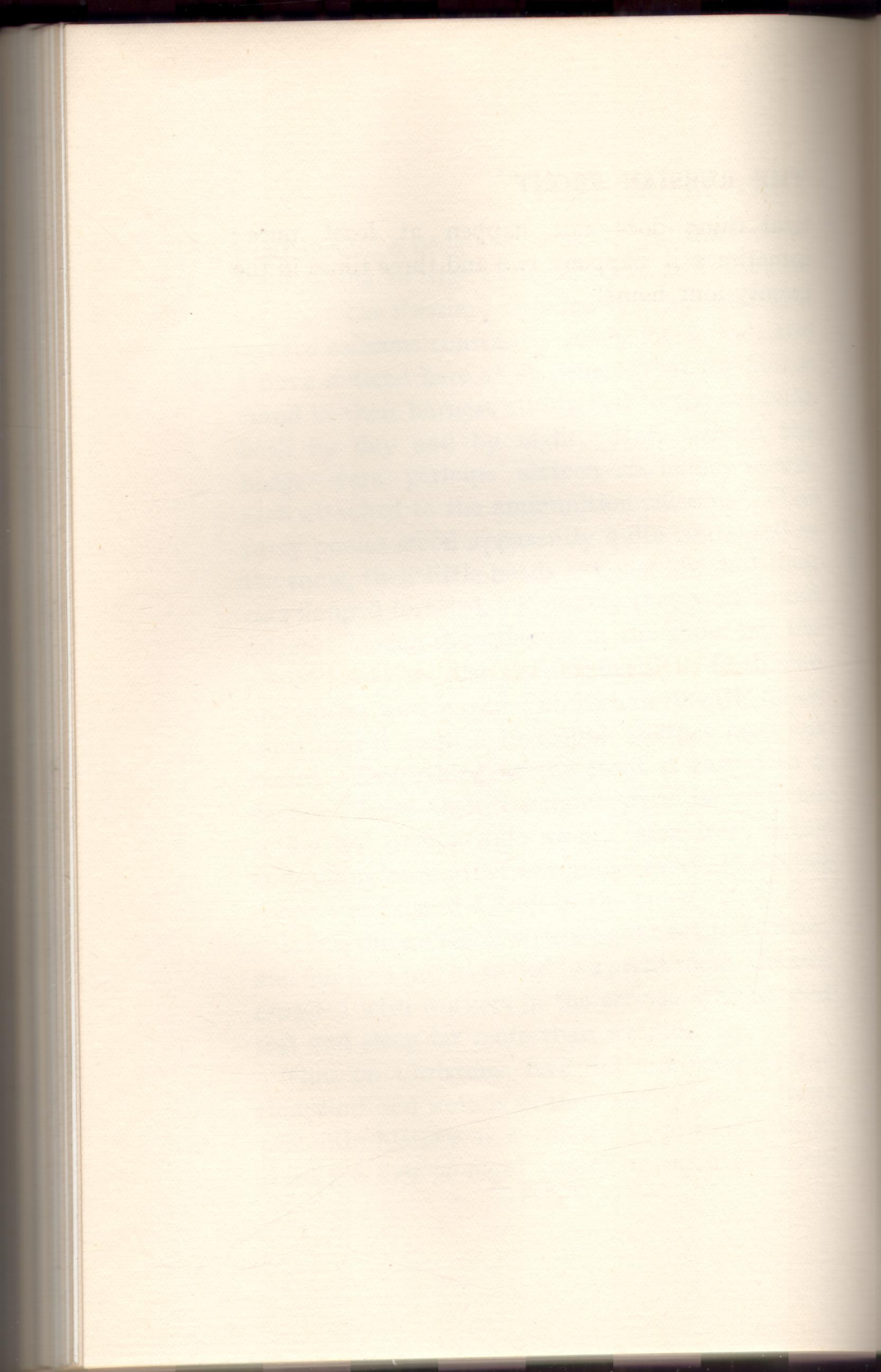
front behind a hedge we stumbled on the reserve ammunition of the batteries that had been in action. The Russians apparently keep their first reserve caissons constantly ready for action, and I have noticed here as elsewhere, that the horses stand in their harness all hitched to the caissons both by day and by night. Here behind the hedge were perhaps sixteen six-horse teams, each attached to the ammunition caissons. The fuzzy ponies stood apparently quite contented in the snow, their little heads hanging low and their ears flopped forward. Probably they were sound asleep. Under the caissons in the snow lay the artillery soldiers, also sleeping deeply. Both men and horses were covered an inch deep with fallen snow, but it seemed to trouble neither men nor horses. Everything at the front is casual to a degree. Here their batteries were in vigorous action not over a mile away. Men were dying and killing each other two miles away, but these chaps were sound asleep in the snow.

It was three o'clock when we got back to Guzow, and our host put us to bed in a great room already crowded with workers in the service, who needed rest and sleep far more than we did.

Thus on Christmas Eve did one more of the thousand odd details of the fighting on our front pass into history as a repulsed German attack. Hardly a day or night passes in which the iden-

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tical thing does not happen at least once ;
sometimes it happens two and three times in the
twenty-four hours.



A VISIT TO THE TRENCHES

A VISIT TO THE BETHLEHEM

CHAPTER XX

A VISIT TO THE TRENCHES

Dated from A CERTAIN PLACE
WEST OF WARSAW,
January 10, 1915.

THE lot of the struggling journalist who wants to see things in this war is a hard one. It is difficult to get west of Warsaw, and the nearer one gets to the front the harder becomes the task. While I was turning over in my mind how to manage it without a knowledge of the Russian language, there came a wire from the General Staff informing me that I had been temporarily assigned to the group of Generals from the Grand Duke's headquarters, who with a Staff Colonel were making a trip over the Warsaw positions. So my way was made easy for three of the pleasantest days that I have had during the war.

The company consisted of General Sir Hanbury Williams, the representative of the British Army, the Marquis De La Guiche from the French,

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and General Oba from the Army of far-off Japan. Colonel Moucanoff of the Grand Duke's personal suite was in charge. Our party left Warsaw in a special train and proceeded to the headquarters of the General commanding the army group west of here. We found the General, whose name is well known in London, but whose identity I am not permitted to disclose, established with his staff in what had formerly been a women's sanatorium. The great sun parlour where the ladies used to bring their knitting, and discuss the gossip of Russia, has now been turned into a telegraph office and general telephone exchange. Here the thousand and one details of the operations of a gigantic army are cleared and digested every day. Great maps with forests of pins show the movements of all the regiments and brigades under this command, and there are enormous numbers of them.

We stopped only long enough to exchange courtesies with the commander and his staff, and then in two great grey military motor-cars started west for the headquarters of a certain army corps, the number of which cannot be disclosed. Our two cars were of the most powerful army types, each directed by a Siberian trooper with a hat like a bushel basket of black wool on his head. The weather was bad, and the roads in horrible shape; but the big cars ploughed



"Times" Correspondent (Stanley Washburn) and Maj.-Gen.
Sir Hanbury Williams.

THE RUSSIAN FRONT

through the mud like an ice breaker opening the channel to a frozen harbour. About 1.30 in the afternoon we turned into a village and at its outskirts into the driveway of a beautiful summer estate, where the commander of the army corps had his headquarters.

The General met us at his door, and with the usual clicking of heels and the saluting of salutes we were ushered into a really lovely house. The front hall was given over to telegraph instruments and dirty troopers and orderlies standing about waiting for instructions. The fine old library with its hardwood floor and wonderful woodwork and bookshelves loaded with volumes in all languages had been taken over for the Commander's private dining-room. The rest of the house was filled with soldiers and officers tramping about in their spurred boots over the shining floors, which, by the way, shine less I should say with each day that the war lasts. Here the General gave us royally of everything that one could desire in the way of food.

Immediately after dinner we emerged into the beautiful grounds, with trees now laden with snow, and accompanied by the Chief of Staff mounted horses and started our journey to the front. Three Cossacks rode ahead; fifty or more fell in behind as a guard of honour, and our little cavalcade proceeded toward the positions. After

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a ride of an hour we halted at another, though less pretentious, villa where the Brigade Commander had his headquarters. Poland being as flat as a board, it is very difficult to get into the advance positions without drawing the fire of the enemy. The road to the trenches for which we were aiming, lay for two miles in direct vision of the German line, and for this reason we dismounted and passed an hour taking tea until the early dusk began to settle over the landscape. As the weather was pretty bad we did not need to remain until it was actually dark before starting, but set out a little after four o'clock. We were not far from the front here and the dull boom of the guns sounded every minute, first from one quarter, and then from another.

For three-quarters of an hour we rode on, and then the Chief of Staff turned suddenly off the road, and by a faint trail through a bit of woodland led us to a clearing. At first sight it contained nothing of interest, but on the farther side we saw at last the carefully masked battery of the Russian heavy artillery. The officer in charge obligingly offered to throw some shells into the German lines for our benefit, but as it was now getting dark and we were anxious to visit the trenches, we declined his offer and proceeded on our way. We made one more halt at the regi-

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mental headquarters and chatted a little with the colonel commanding. From here we moved forward to the edge of a small wood and dismounted and proceeded on foot. The sharp crack of rifles now sounded spasmodically in front of us. Our guide, though a General, seemed to know every foot of the way, and with the sureness of an Indian following a trail in the forest, he led us through the woods, having first warned us to move separately and not in groups.

At last, turning off sharply, we came to the line of reserve trenches. The soldiers were sitting and squatting about in their little shelters, having their suppers as peacefully as though there were in the whole world no such thing as war. From this trench we entered saps and for fifteen minutes followed a maze of twisting trenches, until at last we emerged on the first position itself. This particular front lies along the Rawka river, with the trenches skirting the bluff on our side of the river. Heavy woods crowd to the very brink, and in and out among these runs the labyrinth of the Russian defensive position. I have in the past seen many trenches, but I do not think I have ever been in better and more comfortable ones than these that we now visited. The first line was very deep, possibly eight or ten feet in places, while saps ran back at frequent intervals to the reserve trenches, a hundred or

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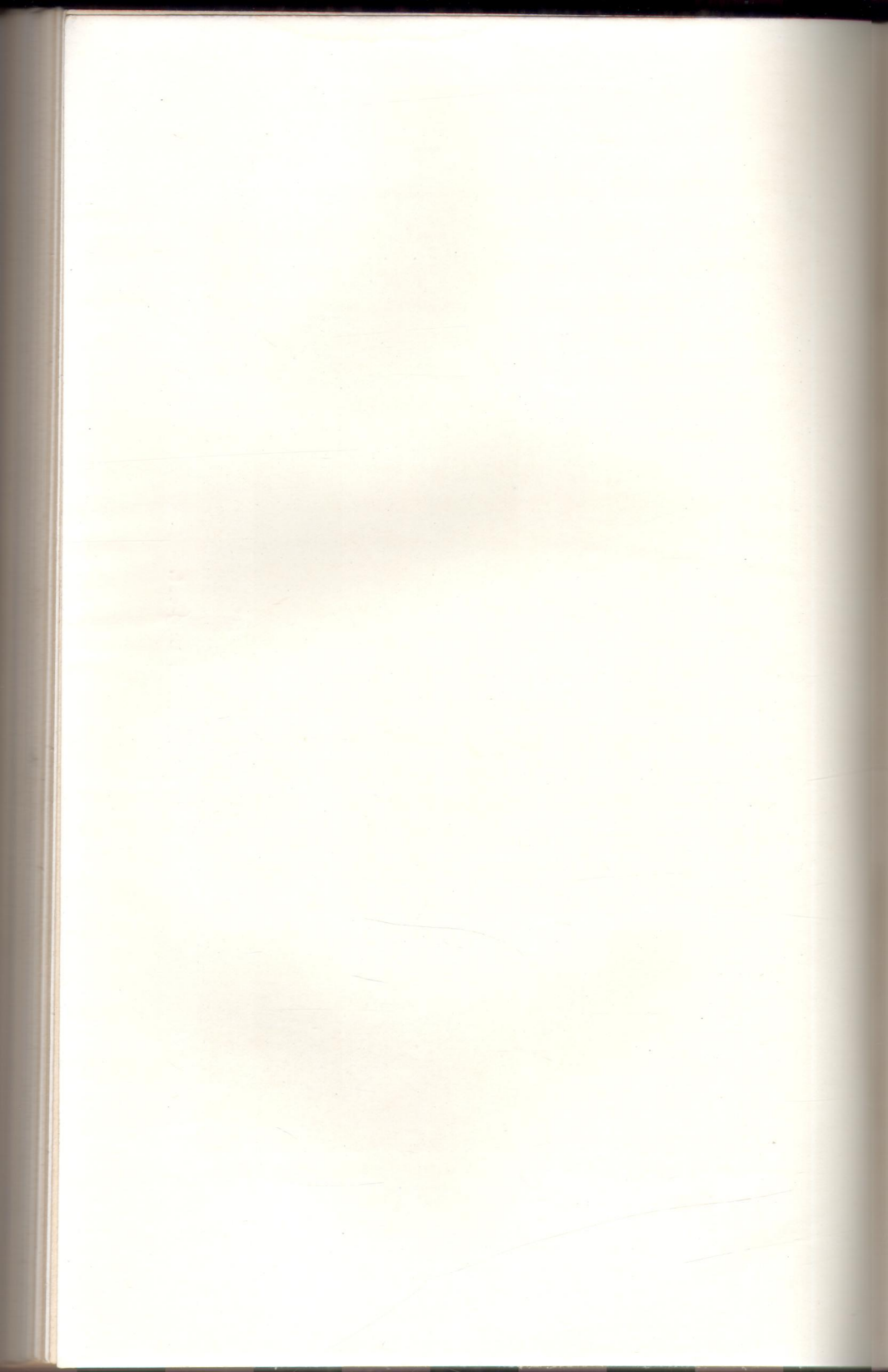
two hundred yards in the rear, where the bulk of the soldiers of the reserves were gathered. We found the men well dug in, and shelters everywhere.

While it is true that a trench is not an ideal place to spend the winter in, yet it is equally true that there is a lot more comfort in a well-made trench than one would imagine possible. The officers' quarters burrowed out of the ground were extremely cosy. The major commanding the battalion had a room fully fifteen feet by ten, ten or fifteen feet under ground. One entered it by steps leading down from the main trench. Sofas, pictures on the walls of dirt, and a writing table on which an oil lamp burned brightly, gave the whole place a homelike appearance that one hardly expected to find on the very front line. The whole was roofed over with six-inch logs, which held up, I suppose, five feet of soil above that. In the corner was a telephone communicating with the headquarters itself. Nothing short of an extremely big shell bursting exactly on the top of the place would bother the inhabitants to any great extent.

Leaving this hospitable shelter we wandered about in the trenches for some time, working our way up to the one which was nearest to the German position. Here in sheltered overhauled ditches, one saw the butts of innumerable guns



A Soldier's Dug-out.



THE RUSSIAN FRONT

sticking out of the loopholes, ready for the soldiers to jump to at the first sound of an advance. The main German line of trenches was between 250 and 300 yards from this position. During the day time this was, in fact, the interval between the armies, but at night both Russians and Germans pushed out their pickets to the brink of the river that ran between, cutting down the distance to merely a hundred yards. While we were there, these pickets, taking advantage of the night which had now completely shut out the view, began to work forward, and then began that spasmodic "crack, crack, crack," that one hears by night up on the front line.

The Russian troops were well clothed and well fed and their *moral* seemed extraordinarily high. The system of reserve trenches connecting with saps with the first line, makes possible frequent changes of the personnel of the first line. The shelters and comforts in the second line or reserve trenches were excellent. My own impression, from what I could make out in the darkness, was that fully two-thirds of the troops were in the second-line trenches, where they were not subjected to the nervous strain of rifle fire and constant sniping from the German side of the river. In case of a German movement during the night the pickets at once discover the activity and report it. Long before the enemy is actually under way, the first-

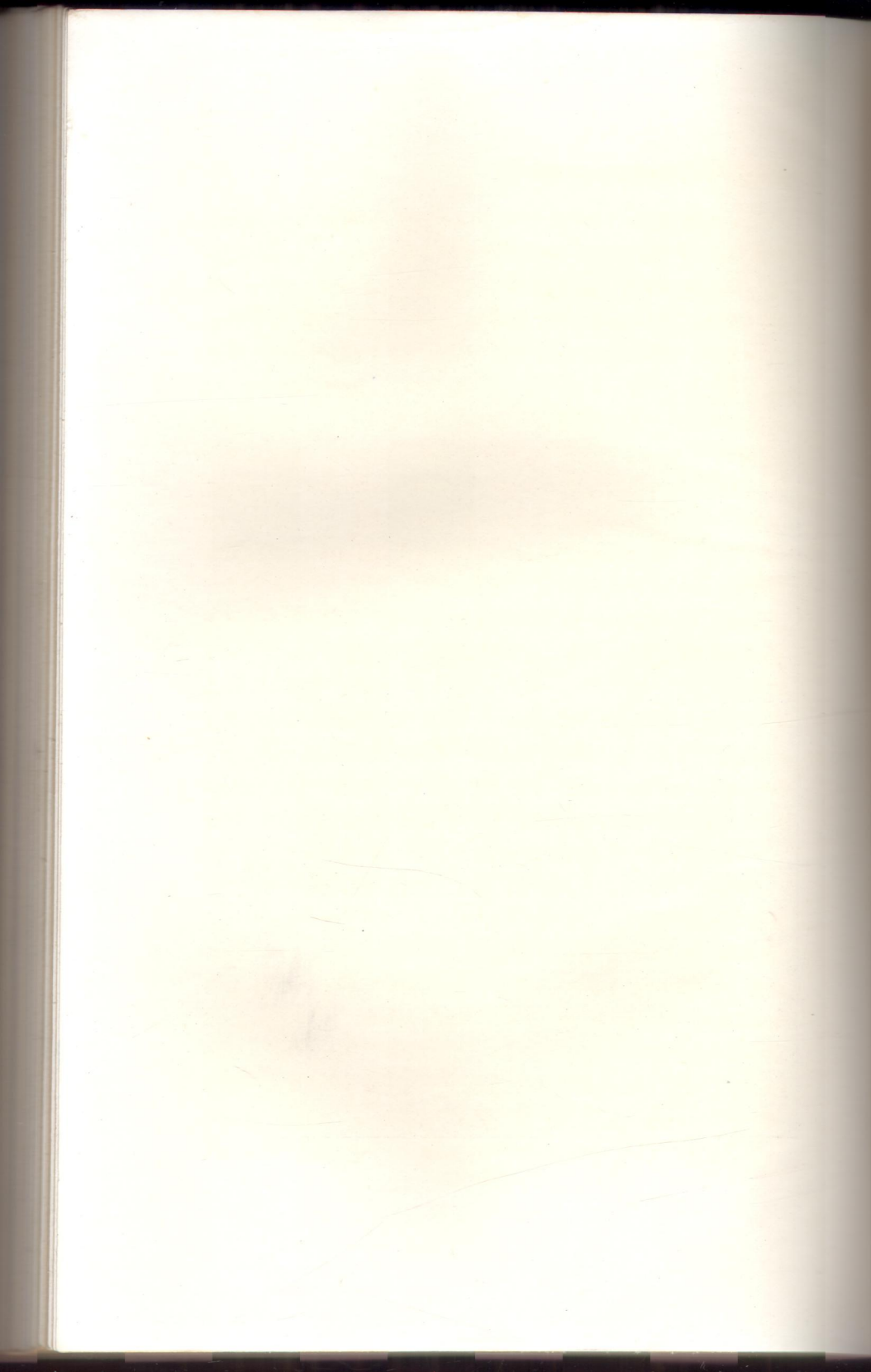
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line defence is at work through the loopholes with rifles and machine guns ; and before the attack becomes actually a menace, the reserves are fed up through the saps, so that by the time the enemy are really pressing the position, they have the entire available Russian line to meet them. From a defensive point of view I think it a fair assumption that the Russians have never had a stronger position in Poland than the so-called Bzura line. If they leave it at all it will be through some strategic consideration, and not, I feel sure, through any menace of a frontal attack.

We left the trenches through the saps by the same way that we had come in, and found our Cossack escort holding our saddled horses back in the woodland where we had left them earlier in the evening. We struck home by a new route, the greater part of the way leading through a most beautiful pine forest, a Cossack with a lantern riding ahead lighting our way. As I rode along in the dark with the clink of Cossack accoutrement jingling on all sides, my companion, General Williams, said the scene reminded him of Western Canada ; and to our surprise we discovered that we were both equally familiar with the great Empire of Western Canada that stretches even to the foothills of the Rockies.



The Colours in the Trenches.



THE RUSSIAN FRONT

It was well on in the evening when our little cavalcade turned into the headquarters driveway. It had begun to snow, and we were all wet and cold and stiff as we slid out of our saddles and turned our ponies over to the Cossack. From within the house there shone cheer and light and the sound of many voices. As we entered the great hall, the full brass military band gathered in the background burst forth with the English National Anthem, followed in turn by that of each of the other Allies represented in our little party.

A sumptuous supper followed, and then we were led into the great beautifully furnished drawing-room in which army cots had been installed for our comfort. It always impresses me strangely to be constantly living in other people's houses, surrounded by all their personal knick-knacks and belongings. Here in a great gold frame on the table was a picture of a wedding party. A sweet girl bride with her little wedding group were sitting in the sunshine on the front porch. It was spring and flowers were everywhere about the verandah where now stand two solid Russian sentries each with fixed bayonet. And as I looked at the picture my mind drifted far from war, and I vaguely wondered where all these nice sweet-faced people in the picture were now. Suddenly the windows shook. "Boom" went

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a great gun not far off. And then again came the same old tumult "Boom, Boom."

"They're off again," said the General as he pulled off his boots. "Let's turn in; it's getting late."

INSPECTING THE WARSAW FRONT

INSPECTING THE WARSAW FRONT

CHAPTER XXI

INSPECTING THE WARSAW FRONT

WARSAW, POLAND,

January 12, 1915.

AFTER travelling about in Poland for hundreds of kilometres in a motor-car and a fair distance on horseback, one comes to view the so-called "front" as a good deal of an abstraction. Here we have a nearly flat country covered with great patches of timber, and in every way adapted to getting lost in. From the plain one sees no landmarks whatsoever, and in the patches of woodland one can wander about for hours within a few miles of the firing line, and see no more signs of war than in the heart of British Columbia. Yet in odd patches it is all soaked in war. If one took an automobile and spent an unmolested month on the job, travelling every day, it might be possible to visit perhaps half of the positions and batteries; but I doubt if even that much could be seen in so short an interval. So, a trip of inspection to the front is like taking a sample of

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grain out of a goods-wagon. It is at best a mere cross-section of the situation at one point, and it is only by visiting a number of isolated and different points which are said to be typical, that one gets even a vague idea as to what the war is really like.

The little party of Generals with whom I have had the privilege of travelling, have been given every opportunity to view these typical situations, and if I describe what we saw, I am giving the reader the situation as accurately as it can be seen by any single person in a trip of a few days.

We spent the night, as has already been told, at the headquarters of the Army Corps Staff. The Chief of Staff, whose name I do not know and which I should not be allowed to mention if I did, is one of the most efficient men I have met in Russia. This admirable soldier gave up his entire day to our party, and under his direction we were up and away by nine in the morning, which is an early start in this country. In our great grey motor-cars we sped over the lovely Polish plain which in this direction tends to roll a little. It reminds one not a little of the Red River Valley in North Dakota, where it begins to slope toward the westward; only here we have patches of forest, which are not found in North Dakota.

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For an hour or two our great snorting cars ploughed through the mud, passing through village after village whose Polish names are difficult to spell, and I believe impossible to pronounce. The natives pronounce them apparently without difficulty, but to a foreigner they are absolutely unpronounceable. We are running in the rear of the lines for the most part, and all the morning the air has been punctured with the occasional deep boom of a big gun. The roads, as usual, are crowded with caissons and transport and battalions of troops or batteries of artillery. A little before noon our cars sped past a sentry and turned into one of those lovely Polish summer places, so beautiful that any millionaire would wish to possess it. A great white villa at the end of an avenue through snow-clad trees is our destination.

This we learn is the Brigade Headquarters of Artillery.

The Colonel in command meets us on the steps as we get out of our cars, with the inevitable clicking of spurs and saluting of salutes. The beautiful old house is upside down with war now. In the front hall are a lot of blood-stained stretchers standing up against the wall. At a table is a telegraph operator. In the background there are mud-stained orderlies and Cossack despatch riders. They have taken up the carpets here, and the

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hardwood floors are stained with mud and dirt. A sweet-faced elderly woman with a Red Cross on her breast meets us, and I gather that she was the mistress of the house before the war broke out.

We stopped here but a few minutes to pick up the artillery Colonel and some of his staff, and then started out on foot to have a look at his positions. Behind the house was a lovely terrace, and below that an artificial lake which, overflowing a little dam at the foot of the beautiful garden, ran out in a little stream that rippled beneath the ice as it wended its way through a patch of pine trees in the corner of the garden. We strolled down a woody path of the estate and suddenly halted in a little clearing. For a moment we saw nothing, and then suddenly realized that we were in one of the Russian big gun positions. But these were so cleverly constructed by Christmas trees studded about the guns that it was impossible to see them until one was almost on them. Before each a space had been made so that the fire just cleared the tops of the trees on the other side of the small clearing. The guns themselves were set back under the pines. These were the big 15-centimetre guns with an 8-verst range. There they sat, their great throats open wide, with their muzzles pointed just enough in elevation to clear

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the tree tops a few yards in front of them. Beside each, the caisson with its shells and charges of powder in brass cartridges were shrouded in trees that had been stuck in the ground all around, leaving only the business side exposed. Behind each gun were little trap-doors in the earth, each of which led down a flight of stairs to a submerged hut beneath the floor of the forest that towered majestically above.

Our friend the Chief of Staff chuckled with glee as he explained to us the difficulty the Germans had had in finding these guns at all. For nearly four weeks they had been in position in this grove, throwing their great shells into the German lines. Again and again the German aeroplanes had hung like hawks above the forest trying to discover the nest of wasps that were stinging them day after day. What information they gained is best indicated from the fact that in four weeks but seven casualties have occurred in this battery, while the German shells that came to search them out were bursting fully a thousand yards from the place where the big guns were placed.

Again we walked on through the woodlands. Our guide, the Chief of Staff, seemed to know the trail as well as the commander of the battery himself. Suddenly he turned off sharply from the

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trail; we moved through the peaceful woods, and in a few hundred yards came on another similar battery, similarly concealed. Here again four great guns sat, their muzzles peering just above the opposite line of tree tops. Certainly the operations of these big guns present the most extraordinary aspect of modern war. Here they sit day after day, miles and miles away from an enemy and from their target. When they are not in action it is as quiet and peaceful in this grove as in a primitive wilderness. No enemy will probably ever actually see them, but if, through misadventure, some skilled and sharp-eyed scout once locates this hidden group of monsters, this bit of woodland will in a few minutes be transferred into a perfect hell of bursting shell and flying splinters of steel. These guns will be overturned and the patient men who work them will be blown to atoms. But as long as they are undiscovered they go quietly about their tasks.

Slipping in their big shells and with nothing visible to the gunners but the row of tree tops across the clearing, the gunners send the projectiles screaming miles and miles away. In a few minutes a telephone tinkles from an observation point, maybe two miles away, and advises the commander of the battery where his shell burst. The gun is altered a little in elevation,

THE RUSSIAN FRONT

and in a few minutes another projectile hurtles out of the grove and over the tree tops to burst miles away on the German position. At last the range is discovered accurately and the soldiers at the guns are told that their work is excellent. Probably nothing in the world can be more impersonal than the operation of these big guns. Unless by misfortune their position is flanked and they are enveloped and captured, it is doubtful if half of the soldiers ever see an enemy during the war at all.

From these guns we pushed forward to the positions where the light guns of the field artillery were crouching in hidden alcoves. After seeing the big howitzers these slim creatures seem as greyhounds compared to mastiffs. These also are all in positions of indirect fire, and, from where we saw them, their target was quite invisible. But for the 'phone message from the observation point, they would never know after their shell left their gun whether it was making good practice or falling miles beyond or short of the enemy. From the field gun positions we trailed off through woodland paths to a slight elevation on the very crest of which the woods ceased and an open rolling country lay spread out before us. Back in the woods were a number of shelters dug out of the forest floor, and, just on the fringe of the wood itself, two tripods standing

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in the brush held aloft the hyperscopes of the artilleryman. These with their high-power lenses brought the German line, several miles away, almost to our feet.

Dug in between the hyperscopes was a sunken shelter in which the field wires converged. These linked up all the guns that were directed from this unobtrusive spot on the fringe of wood which certainly could not have been visible from a hundred yards away.

Our Chief of Staff, who loved every detail of his position, was as pleased as a child with the whole arrangement and showed us on a map where all the guns that we had been looking at during the morning were located relative to this position. "I will bring a battery into action," he said casually, "and you shall see our big gun practise at 6,500 yards. Our target is the German gun position. You can see it through the hyperscope." An obliging subaltern focussed the instrument and by the cross hairs in the field located the exact point that was to be aimed at. When all was adjusted the Chief of Staff spoke quietly to a man at the telephone. A second later there came a great crash from a mile in our rear and then the melancholy whine of a big shell over our heads as with a diminishing wail it hurtled to its destination. A second later a great black spout of earth rose from the German line, and then

THE RUSSIAN FRONT

came the dull thud of the explosion drifting back across the valley. Another crash and another shell passed over our heads and another cloud of earth and flying débris could be seen through the glasses. From a mile to our east and rear came another peal of thunder and again the wail of shells. The second battery that we had seen was in action.

The few German shells that came back in response to the salutation of our guns were not within a thousand yards of their target. For perhaps half an hour the bombardment went on, the Germans who were stung by the shells responding to our challenge, but gradually the fire on both sides slackened and at last subsided. These spasms of firing back and forth break out every few hours, day in and day out, along the entire line of the trenches.

We visited other positions and batteries, and in the afternoon we came back to the villa by the lake. Here there occurred a rather dramatic incident.

As we turned into the great carriage drive we came upon a whole regiment of Russian troops that had been drawn up two ranks deep on each side of the drive for perhaps half a mile. General Williams and Marquis De La Guiche passed down the cheering line, first recognizing with salutes the military honours accorded to them. About a

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hundred yards behind came the little Japanese, General Oba. Spick and span as though he had stepped out of a bandbox, with his trim uniform and gold aigrettes and gold-spurred boots, he looked as chic and smart an officer as one could see in a voyage round the world. As he passed up the line, saluting right and left, the great Russian moujiks cheered themselves hoarse.

As I watched this scene my mind ran back ten years. I was with this little General Oba, then a Colonel on Nogi's staff, before the blood-stained slopes of Port Arthur. In those days we were watching Japanese big guns hurling huge shells into Russian positions and congratulating our Japanese friends when a lucky shot was visible. I think even the little Japanese, the last word in intelligence and efficiency, felt the contrast.

A few minutes later we sat at the table in the great dining-room, having luncheon with the Staff. "Who," I said to him in an undertone, "would have believed, if it had been said to your people in Port Arthur, that in ten years' time you would pass up an avenue in Poland madly cheered as an ally by Russian troops?"

His intelligent eyes flashed, and with the quick intaking of breath with which the Japanese signify pleasure, he replied, "Ah, yes. Who

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indeed?" And as he finished there came a crash from the corner of the garden. The windows shook in their frames. The battery of howitzers was just coming into action once more.

THE NORTH BZURA FRONT

THE KODAK BUREAU

CHAPTER XXII

THE NORTH BZURA FRONT

WARSAW, POLAND,
January 15, 1915.

THIS war is primarily a motor-car war, and it is difficult to imagine what the staff, the Red Cross and the journalists over here would do on this extended front without this conveyance. From Warsaw as a base one can get out to almost any of the positions in a few hours' drive in one of the big high-speed touring cars that are employed by the army.

For the past two days we have been inspecting positions and batteries south of the Skierniewice-Warsaw line of railroad. The last day we put in on the north of that line in the territory lying between the Vistula and the Lowicz-Warsaw line of the railroad. Familiarity makes unusual things common. Nevertheless in the back of my head I do realize that the sights on this road would be really extraordinary if one were not so accustomed to them.

It would not be inapt to call this highway an

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ethnological museum of all the race products of the Russian Empire. I think I never began to realize what an enormous number of diverse peoples come under the heading of "All the Russias." On this road you see them all. In the first place there is the constant stream of officers and Red Cross officials in motor-cars, the type that we associate with Petrograd, Paris or London, or indeed wherever one sees Russians at all. Then of course there are thousands and thousands of the peasant soldiers of European Russia. Just now the roads are blocked with Siberian troops with their heavy faces and their woolly caps. Everywhere between and around are little bunches of Cossacks of all kinds, from South-Eastern Russia, from the Caucasus and from Siberia.

Last but not least we have just got in great bunches of the most extraordinary creatures from some of the Russian dominions in Turkestan. There seem to be two groups of these, each equally undesirable in appearance, and none of them, as far as one can learn, speaking any known language. They are almost as much strangers to the ordinary Russians as they are to us. One group of these gentlemen, who, like all the mounted troops of Russia, go under the name of Cossacks, is clad in untanned sheepskin coats dyed a brilliant orange. They wear on their heads a bushel or

THE RUSSIAN FRONT

more of black wool, in which there is a hole in which the head seems to be inserted. They seem a cross between a Chinaman and a Mongol, with deep red complexions and expressions which do not encourage familiarity.

From somewhere in the same distant region comes another group of gentlemen similarly clad except as to the colour of their sheepskins, which are a deep claret colour. Both ride the most exquisite-looking thoroughbred horses, with long thin legs, and delicate thin faces. When not on the road these men seem to be always engaged in caring for their horses. I have never seen them mingling with any of the other troops at all.

The transport is about equally divided in numbers between the regular Russian carts and the peasant cart of the Pole which, though small, seems well suited for the bad roads of the country. Each month of the war brings us more and more of the Siberian ponies, and practically all the artillery and a great deal of the transport is now equipped with these strong little animals. The more one sees of them the more one comes to realize their value. They certainly do not average over 800 lbs. in weight and are not much bigger than a cow. But when you get six of these sturdy little brutes all pulling at once it is surprising how they will drag a gun or an ammu-

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nition caisson out of the mud. They are equally happy and contented in wind, snow or rain. They sleep contentedly, their lower lips wabbling in absolute peace in a pouring rain or a driving snow-storm. I have seen them standing serenely covered with three inches of snow and apparently as undisturbed as a cow in the sunshine of a hay meadow in summer time.

Out on this front as on others I have observed the prevailing Russian custom of keeping horses in harness all night. The lead team are tied up to a cross rope, and then each team is bedded down with straw, and they stand just as though in a stable, with the caissons containing the reserve ammunition all hooked up. One will often see sixteen or twenty such teams standing contentedly in one place day after day. If there comes a sudden call from the front for ammunition there is no hooking up to do at all. The drivers climb into their saddles, untie their lead teams, and in a moment are off at a gallop down the road or across the fields to relieve the guns that are pumping shrapnel over into the German lines. The first ammunition caissons other than the limber with the battery seem to average about 2,000 yards behind the gun positions; the reserves perhaps six versts behind them and the supports perhaps another six, making all told not over fifteen versts for the entire dis-

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tance between the guns and the ammunition column available for a single day's work.

On the north front our line is now on the edge of the Bzura river and runs through the town of Sochaczew. Just across the river are the German trenches; and here day by day the interminable firing back and forward between pickets and trenches, and between German guns and Russian guns, goes on. Sochaczew has been an object of the Germans' greatest desire, and scores of attacks have been made on this position. Several times to my certain knowledge, the enemy have gained a foothold on our side of the river, but have within a few hours been dislodged and driven back. Fighting of a similar sort went on for thirty-four days around Lowiecz, which is some eighteen or twenty versts to the south and west. We went out and had a look at the position here, but did not get nearer than several thousand yards to the town, because the Germans had chosen this particular time to throw shells into it. It was burning in three or four places, but the officers of the Russian battery which we were visiting regarded the occurrence as a casual one, and said that the Germans lighted up a few fires with their shells every evening at dusk to keep the town illuminated so that they could see what was going on in that direction.

Hardly a day passes when one has not an

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opportunity of seeing German prisoners, and in these one finds unmistakable proof that the armies of the Kaiser are becoming worn and weaker every day. I met a dozen on a certain railway platform the other day, and though my sympathies are not with the German armies, my heart pitied the miserable and pathetic-looking objects in German uniform which stood shivering in the rain waiting for a train to take them to Siberia. Nearly all were undersized, weakly, and haggard. I learned from one of them that they were Ersatz reservists and had been with the colours since August. The strain of constant fighting had told on them severely, and they looked ready to drop with fatigue. But whether one is in sympathy with Germany or not one must accord every respect to these soldiers of the Kaiser. No troops in the world have a better spirit. I got into conversation with these pitiable objects and inquired of one of them if the German army still thought they had a chance of taking Warsaw. Almost before the words were out of my mouth three replied at once. "Certainly," said one. "Without doubt," said the second, and "There is not a question of it," echoed the third. Though all looked pitifully lean and haggard, each insisted that they had more food than they could eat, that every company was absolutely at full strength, and in a word that

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they were in every way satisfied with their cause. The more one sees of the Germans, and these are far below the average in type, the more one begins to feel that there is a long, long road ahead of the Allies before these determined people are broken. They will take a lot of licking, and he is indeed an extraordinary optimist who can question the truth of this statement.

One of the Germans whom I drew aside and questioned sympathetically in his own language, unbent a little and confided to me that as a matter of fact the troops knew nothing whatever about their own movements, and did not even know that an attack was in contemplation until a few minutes before they were ordered out of the trenches. He also informed me that the losses on this front since the last invasion began had been perfectly terrible, a statement by the way which was in absolute contradiction to his previous replies to the Russian officer who questioned him on the same topic.

One phase of the war which is constantly being borne in upon me is that Germany is losing now in personnel that which a generation cannot replace. I am increasingly surprised at the standard of men that one finds in the ranks of the reservists. Mechanics, artisans, students and even professional men abound, all serving as common soldiers. Every attack now, with its

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ghastly losses to the Germans, represents a subtraction from the very best economic and industrial assets that the German Empire has at its disposal. In every group of prisoners one discovers men of the upper middle class who have been withdrawn from productive occupations of every sort. In one of the advance field hospitals last week a young attorney who was serving in the German reserves was brought in with such a hideous wound that his arm had to be taken off at the shoulder.

I am of the opinion that even if Germany could secure peace to-day on highly advantageous terms, she would still find that she has crippled her national life for generations to come. For in these days she is pouring out wantonly and with incredible disregard for the sacrifice she is making, the very blood and brains that has enabled her to build up the great commercial and industrial enterprises which have made her the great power in the world that she is to-day—or was before the British fleet bottled up her vast merchant marine.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCLUSION

IN the foregoing pages the writer has not attempted to give any outline of the whole Russian campaign in sequence. At this time, while we are still in the centre of the chaos and still writing under the supervision of an exceedingly strict censorship, it is absolutely impossible to describe the movements here from even an approach to a fair perspective of the operations. What has been attempted is a number of sketches from firsthand observation, of significant small details of the many thousands which go to make up the war as a whole. These odd scraps of cross sections of life and warfare, as it is seen and conducted on this front, may have a certain fresh interest for readers at home who are probably less familiar with Russia and the Russian method than with any of the other countries involved in the war. It seems therefore worth while to outline very briefly what Russia has done to date, and, as nearly as we know the truth, what the situation on this

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front is at the time when these lines are written.

So great and continuous has been the conflict on the West, that it is possible that England and America fail to appreciate the extent of the actual progress made by Russia since the World War broke out on the first of August. A glance at the map shows clearly enough that Poland, sticking out from the great bulk of European Russia, is by no means a zone of strategic simplicity in which an army may start operations. On the North lies East Prussia, which was occupied by the Germans. On the South lies Galicia, in which the great bulk of the Austrian armies, by means of excellent lines of strategic railways, was instantly concentrated.

Russia started her campaign simultaneously in the North and in the South, as it was of course perfectly evident that no advance from the Polish front on Posen or Berlin, via that route, was in any way possible until at least one of the great nations flanking Poland had been taken care of by the soldiers of the Czar. The Russians met with a catastrophe in East Prussia, owing to the extraordinary difficulty of operating against an extremely efficient enemy in a country of lakes and morasses, totally unfitted for the mobile operations of artillery or transport. The initial advance there proved abortive, and up to the present time the

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advance on Berlin in that direction seems improbable. In Galicia Russia found, pressing instantly in aggression on her whole flank, the united armies of Austria and Hungary, armies which proved themselves to be efficient and well trained. I am still of the opinion that I expressed in the article written from Galicia, that the Russian campaign there has been the most successful movement of the whole war. A vast number of army corps, moving from three or four different bases, in the course of a few months inflicted defeat after defeat on the Austrians and, uniting at the strategic moment, swept the resistance of an enemy (whom it is a great mistake to underestimate merely because he has been beaten) to the Carpathians in the South and up into the little wedge about Cracow in the West.

The first German attempt on Warsaw, as is now well known, was a flat failure and resulted in the absolute collapse of the Austrian and German offensive in the East. The situation round Cracow became acute, and with the early possibility of the fall of that city, and an immediate invasion of Silesia by the Russians, the hand of the enemy was at once forced. Germany was hurried into a demonstration in Poland, following her well-known axiom that the best defence is a vigorous offence. The second Polish invasion was launched so precipitously that two

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of the German army corps came within an ace of being captured, and but for a miscarriage of plans the Russians would have inflicted a very heavy disaster on their enemy. As it was, they undoubtedly threw out the German programme sufficiently to break up their scheme for a sudden advance. Before Lodz, weeks of vigorous fighting were required before the Russians fell back.

The Germans, having now put their hand to the plough of Poland's invasion, diverted army corps after army corps into Poland, pressing the Russians with the intensity and impetuosity which are characteristic of all their campaigning. Step by step the Russians fell back until their line rested from the Vistula through Lowiecz, west of Skierniewice, Breziny and southward. The Germans spent thirty-four days in attacking Lowiecz, which the Russians finally evacuated, to fall back on a partially prepared line on the Bzura river and southwards. An immediate advance on Cracow was suspended and the corps operating in Galicia fell back in order to give the Russians an approximately straight and simple line from the Vistula to the Carpathians. There seems little doubt that the original intention of the Russians was to retire to a line known to us as the "Blonie Line," which is twenty-seven versts west of Warsaw and an

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ideal position of defence. It is probable that the Bzura position was intended as a check rather than a permanent stand, but a week elapsed without the Germans being able to break it strategically. As the cold weather came on, our line grew better, for there is nothing like inclement weather to make soldiers dig in and protect themselves. With each attack the Germans became weaker, and each day brought up fresh reinforcements to the Russians.

It now seems probable to most of us here who have seen the lines and been over a few details of the positions, that the Germans have reached their highwater mark in Poland, and if not actually on the Bzura, then certainly on the Blonie line. A month has elapsed now with fierce fighting at various places along the whole line. In many places battles lasting for days have occurred which gave temporary advantages to the Germans here and there; but usually the gains of to-day are nullified by retirements to-morrow. In many places our line has been dented, but taken as a whole the Bzura-Rawka line stands practically intact and is growing stronger every day. I believe it is not undue optimism to say that the German invasion of Poland, viewed in relation to its strategic aim, has failed. Whether they go back or camp here for the winter is not of great importance.

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Their momentum has been stopped, and their great machine, which depends primarily on the weight and speed of its advance, stands to-day stuck in the mud, with its engines practically at a standstill.

In the South we hear that the Russians are resuming the offensive and there is every reason for concluding that the Austrian army is practically out of the running as an aggressive agent, or as any great help to the German cause. Russia has then, in little more than five months, brought into the field, slowly, yet without confusion, her great army. She has definitely put out of the running the armies of Austria and Hungary and has brought the Germans to a dead halt. It seems to be the opinion in the West that Russia has had an easy task in Galicia, but this is absolutely untrue. The Austrians and Hungarians for months proved a brave and stubborn enemy. Russia has met the first shock and now finds one enemy almost in a state of collapse and the other thrown back on its haunches after a superhuman effort to reach Warsaw. It may be assumed that Germany has made her maximum effort here. Russia has not done so by any means. Day by day her armies are growing stronger and more efficient. By April Russia will be in the best position she has been since the war started, and, as far as one can judge here, will then be just

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prepared to put her maximum strength into the conflict.

It is useless to speculate as to the length of the war. It may be months, and it may be years, but it is the opinion of the writer that with the German failure on Warsaw the scales over here have definitely turned; and that though we may yet have many battles and much carnage, the end is now assured. Germany has made two attempts on Poland, and as it now seems, she has lost her chance.

After nearly five months' association with the Army, there are of course many things that one would like to write, and comments that one would like to make; but in so huge a war one must refrain from anything save the barest generalities until time and distance from the scene can give the perspective which is necessary to justify any definite conclusions.

THE END



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