

GERMANY'S SUPREME EFFORT FOR VICTORY

The Critical Phase of the Great War Has Arrived, Says Fraser

(By LOVAT FRASER)
(One of the Ablest Publicists, Mr. Fraser's Work Always Distinguished by Knowledge and Vision.)

London, May 2 (By Mail).—It is a very unsafe thing to write about the probable future course of an immense battle while the issue still hangs trembling in the balance, but I will take the risk.

Although blacker news may yet arrive which may seem depressing, I will express my personal belief that in this first stage of the battle the Germans have nearly shot their bolt, that they will not reach Amiens, and that the living allied line will remain unbreakable.

But let there be no hosannas yet, and no ringing of bells. We should ring the bells when we have beaten Germany and have enforced a peace which will save the world from enslavement, and not before. We have prematurely claimed far too many illusory "victories" in this war in the west. This mighty battle is not yet over.

Lloyd-George was perfectly right when he said in his message to the United States that it is "only just beginning." I think the Germans will not make much more progress in the first phase because their losses have been very heavy, because their advance has been slower than they expected, because they have had to use up their reserves very rapidly, and because they are just at the point when any offensive, however great, loses momentum and begins to ebb a little.

Their main immediate objective is Amiens, as I ventured to point out when the situation was still obscure. At the moment of writing they are still nearly 11 miles from Amiens, and though they have been massing for a fresh attack against our centre, I doubt whether they will get through or will reach Arras on our left flank. There are very good defensive positions between our present line and Amiens. We command the approaches to Arras.

The French loss of the important railway junction of Montdidier is unfortunate, but not necessarily distressing. Our lines hold the western heights close to the town, and the main line to Paris passes nine miles further west. Make no mistake about our gallant French comrades. They have fought splendidly to retrieve a very bad reverse, and they are being admirably handled.

Of the valour and fortitude of our own troops too much cannot be said. Already I have heard stories of the glorious self-sacrifice of some of our field batteries, which fired into the advancing German until the very last moment, hundreds of sappers who gave their lives to blow up bridges; of noble doctors who stuck to the advanced stations and fell into the hands of the foe. The exploits of our airmen have excelled all previous marvels in air warfare. Men of the Dominions did wondrous things, as we shall hear later on. As for the incomparable infantry of these islands, they have magnificently sustained the imperishable fame of British arms. The enemy have completely failed to destroy our armies, and our line is inviolate.

Failure Means Ruin—For Germany. Should the Germans fail to accomplish their full purpose, this should be the decisive battle of the war. It should be decisive because they have staked their whole position upon the result. Failure or even a half success means for them ruin. Their civil population is very near starvation point. Unless Germany can get peace now she is done. That is why she has tossed all her available military resources into this terrific enterprise, and why, as I believe, Hindenburg will also at the supreme moment try his luck with the German fleet, which he controls. Manifestly if the present offensive fails to destroy the allied armies, Germany can make in the future no greater bid for victory.

But why, if the Germans attain their military purpose, will the battle then prove indecisive? Because though they win Amiens, they will not win peace, the one thing they want. France would fight on, even with her back to the Pyrenees. We should fight on, the United States would fight on, Italy would fight on. We can make no peace with a triumphant Prussian autocracy, and therein lies the greatest of the enemy's miscalculations. We have to save civilization from the most sinister menace which has ever threatened it. Better perish than yield an inch, better die than live enslaved.

Never was an Easter Sunday so big with fate as this. If the battle still swings to and fro, think over the alternatives which depend upon its outcome. There is neither optimism nor pessimism, but only common sense, in weighing up the problem with clear eyes. Yesterday less than 11 miles separated us from the greatest military disaster of the war. If the Germans get to Amiens they will hurl the whole of our northern positions. They may cut us off from the main French forces. They will be able to threaten the channel, and will have entirely transformed the military position. But will they have decisively beaten us? Will they be able to dictate peace? No, a thousand times no.

There are other measures possible which will enable us to continue the war in France, perhaps even more effectively than before. No need to discuss them here, but rest assured that the chances which will be wrought if the Germans capture Amiens have been fully foreseen and provided for.

On the other hand, supposing the

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enemy fail to reach Amiens, as I believe they will fail. Supposing the whole line holds, as I believe it will hold. We must then expect a brief lull, followed by a swift renewal of the conflict, possibly by attacks upon other parts of the allied line in France or Flanders. If the first phase of the battle stops far short of a German triumph, we shall still be a very long way from safety. But I have small fear about the later phases of the battle. If we foil the Germans now we shall foil them always. What I rather fear is the extraordinary capacity of this country for self-deception which the war has so strikingly revealed. I fear that if the first phase ends with the gallant allied armies in unbroken and continuous array there will be so much jubilation that the lessons of this stern and terrible ordeal will be overlooked.

Meanwhile the nation will support the government in all measures they may take in this solemn emergency. Yet there should be no resort to panic legislation. There is much talk of raising the military age, which is already 43. I do not personally consider the raising of the military age to be either wise or scientific. I went into the question some months ago with the experts of the ministry of national service, and they then convinced me that it was almost useless to raise the age. Such a step will swell the pension lists enormously, will produce few useful recruits, and will do little good. This is a young man's war. I see it constantly stated that there are lots of "young strong men" in the home forces who ought to be replaced. The "young strong

men" were mostly replaced long ago. If I honestly thought it would help to win the war I would be in favor of raising the military age to 70, but I believe any further increase will impair the already weakened fabric of the state and encumber the pay-rolls with useless men.

There are four courses open. The first is to accelerate and intensify the "comb-out," so far as war industrial requirements permit. The second is to apply compulsion to Ireland. If this government summons Englishmen of 50 to the colors while it is afraid to deal with the young men of Ireland, then it is too cowardly to fight Germany effectively.

The third course is to speed up American reinforcements. There are 20,000,000 men of military age in the United States, which entered the war a year ago, and has always been regarded as "the land of hushie."

The fourth course is to begin a diversion through Siberia with the Japanese army. Japan possesses nearly 60 divisions, which have been immobilized, largely owing to Washington.

Until Washington has "delivered the goods," it has no right to adopt a policy which tends to keep a powerful army out of the war while the Western Allies are bleeding from gaping wounds. We get a great many admortory messages from the United States, and I hope the above message may go across the ocean in return. I have many American friends, and I never knew any of them resent plain speaking. (By the International News Bureau, Inc., Boston, Mass.)



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