II. THE END OF THE WAR[1]

The prophet who emerges with the most honour from this war is Bloch. It must be fifteen or sixteen years ago since this gifted Pole made his forecast of the future. Perhaps it is more, for the French translation of his book was certainly in existence before the Boer War. His case was that war between antagonists of fairly equal equipment must end in a deadlock because of the continually increasing defensive efficiency of entrenched infantry. This would give the defensive an advantage over the most brilliant strategy and over considerably superior numbers that would completely discourage all aggression. He concluded that war was played out.

[Footnote 1: This chapter was originally a newspaper article. It was written in December, 1915, and published about the middle of January. Some of it has passed from the quality of anticipation to achievement, but I do not see that it needs any material revision on that account.]

His book was very carefully studied in Germany. As a humble disciple of Bloch I should have realised this, but I did not, and that failure led me into some unfortunate prophesying at the outbreak of the war. I judged Germany by the Kaiser, and by the Kaiser-worship which I saw in Berlin. I thought that he was a theatrical person who would dream of vast massed attacks and tremendous cavalry charges, and that he would lead Germany to be smashed against the Allied defensive in the West, and

to be smashed so thoroughly that the war would be over. I did not properly appreciate the more studious and more thorough Germany that was to fight behind the Kaiser and thrust him aside, the Germany we British fight now, the Ostwald-Krupp Germany of 1915. That Germany, one may now perceive, had read and thought over and thought out the Bloch problem.

There was also a translation of Bloch into French. In English a portion of his book was translated for the general reader and published with a preface by the late Mr. W.T. Stead. It does not seem to have reached the British military authorities, nor was it published in England with an instructive intention. As an imaginative work it would have been considered worthless and impracticable.

But it is manifest now that if the Belgian and French frontiers had been properly prepared--as they should have been prepared when the Germans built their strategic railways--with trenches and gun emplacements and secondary and tertiary lines, the Germans would never have got fifty miles into either France or Belgium. They would have been held at Liége and in the Ardennes. Five hundred thousand men would have held them indefinitely. But the Allies had never worked trench warfare; they were unready for it, Germans knew of their unreadiness, and their unreadiness it is quite clear they calculated. They did not reckon, it is now clear that they were right in not reckoning, the Allies as contemporary soldiers. They were going to fight a 1900 army with a 1914 army, and their whole opening scheme was based on the conviction that the Allies would not entrench.

Somebody in those marvellous maxims from the dark ages that seem to form the chief reading of our military experts, said that the army that entrenches is a defeated army. The silly dictum was repeated and repeated in the English papers after the battle of the Marne. It shows just where our military science had reached in 1914, namely, to a level a year before Bloch wrote. So the Allies retreated.

For long weeks the Allies retreated out of the west of Belgium, out of the north of France, and for rather over a month there was a loose mobile war--as if Bloch had never existed. The Germans were not fighting the 1914 pattern of war, they were fighting the 1899 pattern of war, in which direct attack, outflanking and so on were still supposed to be possible; they were fighting confident in their overwhelming numbers, in their prepared surprise, in the unthought-out methods of their opponents. In the "Victorian" war that ended in the middle of September, 1914, they delivered their blow, they over-reached, they were successfully counter-attacked on the Marne, and then abruptly--almost unfairly it seemed to the British sportsmanlike conceptions--they shifted to the game played according to the very latest rules of 1914. The war did not come up to date until the battle of the Aisne. With that the second act of the great drama began.

I do not believe that the Germans ever thought it would come up to date so soon. I believe they thought that they would hustle the French out of Paris, come right up to the Channel at Calais before the end of 1914,

and then entrench, produce the submarine attack and the Zeppelins against England, working from Calais as a base, and that they would end the war before the spring of 1915--with the Allies still a good fifteen years behindhand.

I believe the battle of the Marne was the decisive battle of the war, in that it shattered this plan, and that the rest of the 1914 fighting was Germany's attempt to reconstruct their broken scheme in the face of an enemy who was continually getting more and more nearly up to date with the fighting. By December, Bloch, who had seemed utterly discredited in August, was justified up to the hilt. The world was entrenched at his feet. By May the lagging military science of the British had so far overtaken events as to realise that shrapnel was no longer so important as high explosive, and within a year the significance of machine guns, a significance thoroughly ventilated by imaginative writers fifteen years before, was being grasped by the conservative but by no means inadaptable leaders of Britain.

The war since that first attempt--admirably planned and altogether justifiable (from a military point of view, I mean)--of Germany to "rush" a victory, has consisted almost entirely of failures on both sides either to get round or through or over the situation foretold by Bloch. There has been only one marked success, the German success in Poland due to the failure of the Russian munitions. Then for a time the war in the East was mobile and precarious while the Russians retreated to their present positions, and the Germans pursued and tried to

surround them. That was a lapse into the pre-Bloch style. Now the Russians are again entrenched, their supplies are restored, the Germans have a lengthened line of supplies, and Bloch is back upon his pedestal so far as the Eastern theatre goes.

Bloch has been equally justified in the Anglo-French attempt to get round through Gallipoli. The forces of the India Office have pushed their way through unprepared country towards Bagdad, and are now entrenching in Mesopotamia, but from the point of view of the main war that is too remote to be considered either getting through or getting round; and so too the losses of the German colonies and the East African War are scarcely to be reckoned with in the main war. They have no determining value. There remains the Balkan struggle. But the Balkan struggle is something else; it is something new. It must be treated separately. It is a war of treacheries and brags and appearances. It is not a part of, it is a sequence to, the deadlock war of 1915.

But before dealing with this new development of the latter half of 1915 it is necessary to consider certain general aspects of the deadlock war. It is manifest that the Germans hoped to secure an effective victory in this war before they ran up against Bloch. But reckoning with Bloch, as they certainly did, they hoped that even in the event of the war getting to earth, it would still be possible to produce novelties that would sufficiently neutralise Bloch to secure a victorious peace. With unexpectedly powerful artillery suddenly concentrated, with high explosives, with asphyxiating gas, with a well-organised system of

grenade throwing and mining, with attacks of flaming gas, and above all with a vast munition-making plant to keep them going, they had a very reasonable chance of hacking their way through.

Against these prepared novelties the Allies have had to improvise, and on the whole the improvisation has kept pace with the demands made upon it. They have brought their military science up to date, and to-day the disparity in science and equipment between the antagonists has greatly diminished. There has been no escaping Bloch after all, and the deadlock, if no sudden peace occurs, can end now in only one thing, the exhaustion in various degrees of all the combatants and the succumbing of the most exhausted. The idea of a conclusive end of the traditional pattern to this war, of a triumphal entry into London, Paris, Berlin or Moscow, is to be dismissed altogether from our calculations. The end of this war will be a matter of negotiation between practically immobilised and extremely shattered antagonists.

There is, of course, one aspect of the Bloch deadlock that the Germans at least have contemplated. If it is not possible to get through or round, it may still be possible to get over. There is the air path.

This idea has certainly taken hold of the French mind, but France has been too busy and is temperamentally too economical to risk large expenditures upon what is necessarily an experiment. The British are too conservative and sceptical to be the pioneers in any such enterprise. The Russians have been too poor in the necessary resources of mechanics

and material.

The Germans alone have made any sustained attempt to strike through the air at their enemies beyond the war zone. Their Zeppelin raids upon England have shown a steadily increasing efficiency, and it is highly probable that they will be repeated on a much larger scale before the war is over. Quite possibly, too, the Germans are developing an accessory force of large aeroplanes to co-operate in such an attack. The long coasts of Britain, the impossibility of their being fully equipped throughout their extent, except at a prohibitive cost of men and material, to resist air invaders, exposes the whole length of the island to considerable risk and annoyance from such an expedition.

It is doubtful, though, if the utmost damage an air raid is likely to inflict upon England would count materially in the exhaustion process, and the moral effect of these raids has been, and will be, to stiffen the British resolution to fight this war through to the conclusive ending of any such possibilities.

The net result of these air raids is an inflexible determination of the British people rather to die in death grips with German militarism than to live and let it survive. The best chance for the aircraft was at the beginning of the war, when a surprise development might have had astounding results. That chance has gone by. The Germans are racially inferior to both French and English in the air, and the probability of effective blows over the deadlock is on the whole a probability in

favour of the Allies. Nor is there anything on or under the sea that seems likely now to produce decisive results. We return from these considerations to a strengthened acceptance of Bloch.

The essential question for the prophet remains therefore the question of which group of Powers will exhaust itself most rapidly. And following on from that comes the question of how the successive stages of exhaustion will manifest themselves in the combatant nations. The problems of this war, as of all war, end as they begin in national psychology.

But it will be urged that this is reckoning without the Balkans. I submit that the German thrust through the wooded wilderness of Serbia is really no part of the war that has ended in the deadlock of 1915. It is dramatic, tragic, spectacular, but it is quite inconclusive. Here there is no way round or through to any vital centre of Germany's antagonists. It turns nothing; it opens no path to Paris, London, or Petrograd. It is a long, long way from the Danube to either Egypt or Mesopotamia, and there--and there--Bloch is waiting. I do not think the Germans have any intention of so generous an extension of their responsibilities. The Balkan complication is no solution of the deadlock problem. It is the opening of the sequel.

A whole series of new problems are opened up directly we turn to this most troubled region of the Balkans--problems of the value of kingship, of nationality, of the destiny of such cities as Constantinople, which from their very beginning have never had any sort of nationality at all,

of the destiny of countries such as Albania, where a tangle of intense tribal nationalities is distributed in spots and patches, or Dalmatia, where one extremely self-conscious nation and language is present in the towns and another in the surrounding country, or Asia Minor, where no definite national boundaries, no religious, linguistic, or social homogeneities have ever established themselves since the Roman legions beat them down.

But all these questions can really be deferred or set aside in our present discussion, which is a discussion of the main war. Whatever surprises or changes this last phase of the Eastern Empire, that blood-clotted melodrama, may involve, they will but assist and hasten on the essential conclusion of the great war, that the Central Powers and their pledged antagonists are in a deadlock, unable to reach a decision, and steadily, day by day, hour by hour, losing men, destroying material, spending credit, approaching something unprecedented, unknown, that we try to express to ourselves by the word exhaustion.

Just how the people who use the word "exhaustion" so freely are prepared to define it, is a matter for speculation. The idea seems to be a phase in which the production of equipped forces ceases through the using up of men or material or both. If the exhaustion is fairly mutual, it need not be decisive for a long time. It may mean simply an ebb of vigour on both sides, unusual hardship, a general social and economic disorganisation and grading down. The fact that a great killing off of men is implicit in the process, and that the survivors will be largely

under discipline, militates against the idea that the end may come suddenly through a vigorous revolutionary outbreak. Exhaustion is likely to be a very long and very thorough process, extending over years. A "war of attrition" may last into 1918 or 1919, and may bring us to conditions of strain and deprivation still only very vaguely imagined. What happens in the Turkish Empire or India or America or elsewhere may extend the areas of waste and accelerate or retard the process, but is quite unlikely to end it.

Let us ask now which of the combatants is likely to undergo exhaustion most rapidly, and what is of equal or greater importance, which is likely to feel it first and most? No doubt there is a bias in my mind, but it seems to me that the odds are on the whole heavily against the Central Powers. Their peculiar German virtue, their tremendously complete organisation, which enabled them to put so large a proportion of their total resources into their first onslaught and to make so great and rapid a recovery in the spring of 1915, leaves them with less to draw upon now. Out of a smaller fortune they have spent a larger sum. They are blockaded to a very considerable extent, and against them fight not merely the resources of the Allies, but, thanks to the complete British victory in the sea struggle, the purchasable resources of all the world.

Conceivably the Central Powers will draw upon the resources of their Balkan and Asiatic allies, but the extent to which they can do that may very easily be over-estimated. There is a limit to the power for treason

of these supposititious German monarchs that Western folly has permitted to possess these Balkan thrones--thrones which need never have been thrones at all--and none of the Balkan peoples is likely to witness with enthusiasm the complete looting of its country in the German interest by a German court. Germany will have to pay on the nail for most of her Balkan help. She will have to put more into the Balkans than she takes out.

Compared with the world behind the Allies the Turkish Empire is a country of mountains, desert and undeveloped lands. To develop these regions into a source of supplies under the strains and shortages of war-time, will be an immense and dangerous undertaking for Germany. She may open mines she may never work, build railways that others will enjoy, sow harvests for alien reaping. The people the Bulgarians want in Bulgaria are not Germans but Bulgarians; the people the Turks want in Anatolia are not Germans but Turks. And for all these tasks Germany must send men. Men?

At present, so far as any judgment is possible, Germany is feeling the pinch of the war much more even than France, which is habitually parsimonious, and instinctively cleverly economical, and Russia, which is hardy and insensitive. Great Britain has really only begun to feel the stress. She has probably suffered economically no more than have Holland or Switzerland, and Italy and Japan have certainly suffered less. All these three great countries are still full of men, of gear, of saleable futures. In every part of the globe Great Britain has colossal

investments. She has still to apply the great principle of conscription not only to her sons but to the property of her overseas investors and of her landed proprietors. She has not even looked yet at the German financial expedients of a year ago. She moves reluctantly, but surely, towards such a thoroughness of mobilisation. There need be no doubt that she will completely socialise herself, completely reorganise her whole social and economic structure sooner than lose this war. She will do it clumsily and ungracefully, with much internal bickering, with much trickery on the part of her lawyers, and much baseness on the part of her landlords; but she will do it not so slowly as a logical mind might anticipate. She will get there a little late, expensively, but still in time....

The German group, I reckon, therefore, will become exhausted first. I think, too, that Germany will, as a nation, feel and be aware of what is happening to her sooner than any other of the nations that are sharing in this process of depletion. In 1914 the Germans were reaping the harvest of forty years of economic development and business enterprise. Property and plenty were new experiences, and a generation had grown up in whose world a sense of expansion and progress was normal. There existed amongst it no tradition of the great hardship of war, such as the French possessed, to steel its mind. It had none of the irrational mute toughness of the Russians and British. It was a sentimental people, making a habit of success; it rushed chanting to war against the most grimly heroic and the most stolidly enduring of races. Germany came into this war more buoyantly and confidently than any other combatant. It

expected another 1871; at the utmost it anticipated a year of war.

Never were a people so disillusioned as the Germans must already be, never has a nation been called upon for so complete a mental readjustment. Neither conclusive victories nor defeats have been theirs, but only a slow, vast transition from joyful effort and an illusion of rapid triumph to hardship, loss and loss and loss of substance, the dwindling of great hopes, the realisation of ebb in the tide of national welfare. Now they must fight on against implacable, indomitable Allies. They are under stresses now as harsh at least as the stresses of France. And, compared with the French, the Germans are untempered steel.

We know little of the psychology of this new Germany that has come into being since 1871, but it is doubtful if it will accept defeat, and still more doubtful how it can evade some ending to the war that will admit the failure of all its great hopes of Paris subjugated, London humbled, Russia suppliant, Belgium conquered, the Near East a prey. Such an admission will be a day of reckoning that German Imperialism will postpone until the last hope of some breach among the Allies, some saving miracle in the old Eastern Empire, some dramatically-snatched victory at the eleventh hour, is gone.

Nor can the Pledged Allies consent to a peace that does not involve the evacuation and compensation of Belgium and Serbia, and at least the autonomy of the lost Rhine provinces of France. That is their very minimum. That, and the making of Germany so sick and weary of military

adventure that the danger of German ambition will cease to overshadow European life. Those are the ends of the main war. Europe will go down through stage after stage of impoverishment and exhaustion until these ends are attained, or made for ever impossible.

But these things form only the main outline of a story with a vast amount of collateral interest. It is to these collateral issues that the amateur in prophecy must give his attention. It is here that the German will be induced by his Government to see his compensations. He will be consoled for the restoration of Serbia by the prospect of future conflicts between Italian and Jugoslav that will let him in again to the Adriatic. His attention will be directed to his newer, closer association with Bulgaria and Turkey. In those countries he will be told he may yet repeat the miracle of Hungary. And there may be also another Hungary in Poland. It will be whispered to him that he has really conquered those countries when indeed it is highly probable he has only spent his substance in setting up new assertive alien allies. The Kaiser, if he is not too afraid of the precedent of Sarajevo, may make a great entry into Constantinople, with an effect of conquering what is after all only a temporarily allied capital. The German will hope also to retain his fleet, and no peace, he will be reminded, can rob him of his hard-earned technical superiority in the air. The German air fleet of 1930 may yet be something as predominant as the British Navy of 1915, and capable of delivering a much more intimate blow. Had he not better wait for that? When such consolations as these become popular in the German Press we of the Pledged Allies may begin to talk of peace, for

these will be its necessary heralds.

The concluding phase of a process of general exhaustion must almost inevitably be a game of bluff. Neither side will admit its extremity. Neither side, therefore, will make any direct proposals to its antagonists nor any open advances to a neutral. But there will be much inspired peace talk through neutral media, and the consultations of the anti-German allies will become more intimate and detailed. Suggestions will "leak out" remarkably from both sides, to journalists and neutral go-betweens. The Eastern and Western Allies will probably begin quite soon to discuss an anti-German Zollverein and the co-ordination of their military and naval organisations in the days that are to follow the war. A discussion of a Central European Zollverein is already afoot. A general idea of the possible rearrangement of the European States after the war will grow up in the common European and American mind; public men on either side will indicate concordance with this general idea, and some neutral power, Denmark or Spain or the United States or Holland, will invite representatives to an informal discussion of these possibilities.

Probably, therefore, the peace negotiations will take the extraordinary form of two simultaneous conferences--one of the Pledged Allies, sitting probably in Paris or London, and the other of representatives of all the combatants meeting in some neutral country--Holland would be the most convenient--while the war will still be going on. The Dutch conference would be in immediate contact by telephone and telegraph with the Allied

conference and with Berlin....

The broad conditions of a possible peace will begin to get stated towards the end of 1916, and a certain lassitude will creep over the operations in the field.... The process of exhaustion will probably have reached such a point by that time that it will be a primary fact in the consciousness of common citizens of every belligerent country. The common life of all Europe will have become--miserable. Conclusive blows will have receded out of the imagination of the contending Powers. The war will have reached its fourth and last stage as a war. The war of the great attack will have given place to the war of the military deadlock; the war of the deadlock will have gone on, and as the great combatants have become enfeebled relatively to the smaller States, there will have been a gradual shifting of the interest to the war of treasons and diplomacies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Quickly thereafter the last phase will be developing into predominance, in which each group of nations will be most concerned, no longer about victories or conquests, but about securing for itself the best chances of rapid economic recuperation and social reconstruction. The commercial treaties, the arrangements for future associated action, made by the great Allies among themselves will appear more and more important to them, and the mere question of boundaries less and less. It will dawn upon Europe that she has already dissipated the resources that have enabled her to levy the tribute paid for her investments in every quarter of the earth, and that neither the Germans nor their antagonists

will be able for many years to go on with those projects for world exploitation which lay at the root of the great war. Very jaded and anaemic nations will sit about the table on which the new map of Europe will be drawn.... Each of the diplomatists will come to that business with a certain pre-occupation. Each will be thinking of his country as one thinks of a patient of doubtful patience and temper who is coming-to out of the drugged stupor of a crucial, ill-conceived, and unnecessary operation ... Each will be thinking of Labour, wounded and perplexed, returning to the disorganised or nationalised factories from which Capital has gone a-fighting, and to which it may never return.