

**FORTY YEARS AFTER: THE
STORY OF THE FRANCO-
GERMAN WAR, 1870**

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Forty years after: the story of the Franco-German war, 1870 by H. C. Bailey & W. L. Courtney

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H. C. BAILEY & W. L. COURTNEY

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FORTY YEARS AFTER

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THE STORY OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN
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BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

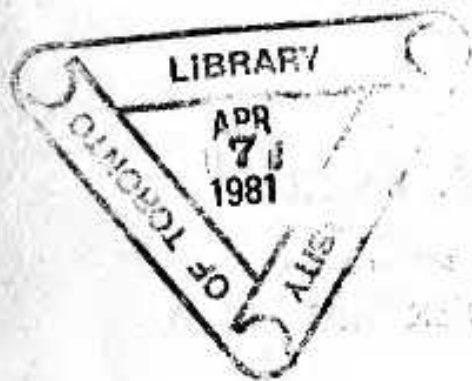
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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

I

IN the midst of a Franco-German conflict, in which the whole military resources of Berlin, combined with those of Vienna, are pitted against the members of the Triple Entente, it is natural that many readers should turn back to the records of the similar conflict which was waged in 1870. Only middle-aged men are able to recall the incidents in the earlier campaign. To the majority of us it remains as the mere memory of some great and devastating tornado, which laid waste the fields of France, and tore away from her the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.

It is curious, however, to note, despite certain points of resemblance, how different the two campaigns are, both in general and in special features. In 1870 France and Germany were the sole combatants. It is true that Napoleon III. expected the assistance, both of Austria and of Italy. But that was one of the fatal mis-calculations of his policy, which in other respects

also betrayed an absence of prevision and thought. While the Prussians were fighting Austria in 1866 Napoleon had a great opportunity of intervening on the side of the country which was ultimately defeated. That he did not take this opportunity proves that he had not clearly foreseen the ultimate and inevitable conflict between himself and the War Lords of Berlin. Subsequently he made some tentative efforts to retrieve this mistake, and he seems to have thought that he had secured for himself a definite chance of assistance from lands imperilled by the growing might of Prussia. Undoubtedly, he thought that he had been betrayed in this matter, but the details of the negotiations are very obscure and the main fact is that, at the outbreak of hostilities in the beginning of August 1870, France stood alone and the sympathies of Europe at large were doubtful. It must be remembered that France during the Third Empire was constantly menacing the peace of Europe, just as she had done during the First Empire, and among the smaller nationalities at all events there was little or no affection towards Napoleon himself.

In the present war of 1914 the rôles are

reversed. France is not the aggressor, but Germany, and the Emperor William stands as the despot whom Europe fears, Hence in the present gigantic campaign we have Germany, with its ally Austria, confronted by France on the west, Russia on the east, with Great Britain co-operating in aid of the Triple Entente both by land and sea ; while Italy hesitates whether or no to join the forces in which she is most interested and help the French fleet to clear the Adriatic of her Austrian rival. Thus the sympathies of the world are clearly on the side of the Triple Entente, for it is generally recognized that a Europe dominated by the Kaiser would be almost uninhabitable. The chief feature, in fact, of the present situation is the uprising of free peoples against a dominion of brute force and arrogant materialism.

RAPIDITY AND DILATORINESS

The war has already lasted a little more than six weeks, and at once a fresh point of difference between it and the war of 1870 is apparent. Nothing was more striking than the rapidity with which events moved in the earlier campaign. A forward movement took place about the 28th July in 1870. On August 1st occurred the

somewhat theatrical affair at Saarbrücken, when the young Prince Imperial received his "baptism of fire." As a matter of fact Napoleon III. was forced to make some sort of move owing to the slow concentration of the French troops, and his desire to attract the sympathy, and probably the help, of the Austrians and Italians. Then followed a series of engagements. On August 4th a German victory at Weissenburg was closely followed on the 6th by similar triumphs at Spicheren and Wörth. After an interval of a week there occurred, on August 13th, the struggle at Colombey-Borny. Three days afterwards the news arrived of a German victory at Vionville-Mars-la-Tour, and two days after that of a sanguinary engagement at Gravelotte-St. Privat. On August 19th the investment of Bazaine in Metz was begun. Less than a fortnight afterwards, on September 1st, came the crowning disaster at Sedan, when Napoleon III. surrendered to his German conqueror. Thus the most significant incidents were all crowded into a space of some five weeks. The forces engaged were not so large as those which have met in the shock of battle during the course of the present war, but the German superiority was everywhere visible, and the issue of

the campaign, after the first few days, was never really in doubt.

THE BARRIER OF LIÈGE

Compare this drama of five weeks with the opening of the war of 1914, and the contrast is vivid and striking. On August 2nd the Germans violated the neutrality of Luxemburg and probably made a raid over the frontier at Longwy or Cirey. On August 3rd and 4th Belgium was invaded in defiance of all the treaties. On the 5th and 6th commenced the struggle before Liège, in which the Belgians obstinately, and successfully, resisted the attacks of the invading army. On the 7th, so greatly had the Germans suffered in these engagements, an armistice was asked for and refused. On the same day, in another part of the theatre of war, in Alsace, the French had commenced offensive operations and captured Altkirch. On August 12th and 13th took place the fights at Haelen and Eghezee, followed on the 15th by a serious battle at Dinant, in which the French prevented an attempted crossing of the River Meuse and recaptured Dinant itself which had been taken by the enemy. The British Expeditionary Force was safely landed on the French coast and sent to join the