

## A REARGUARD ACTION

A REPRODUCED ACTION

## CHAPTER XII

### A REARGUARD ACTION

SKIERNIEWICE, POLAND,

*October, 28, 1914.*

WE motored over to this pretty little Polish city from Lowicz this morning and have had a very interesting day. We are hard on the trail of the retreating Germans, but it takes a motor-car very nearly at its best to keep up with the retreat which is moving as rapidly as getting out their guns and transport permits. The Russians occupied this town only a few days ago, but already the front has advanced something over thirty kilometres. This place, however, is the immediate base to which the wounded are coming, and was therefore alive with soldiers, transport going out, and the flotsam and jetsam of battle coming back. The Germans blew up all the bridges as they retired, so that we had to take carriages that could ford the streams where motors were impossible.

The country through here is beautiful, and the roads splendid, so we travelled rapidly. On every

## FIELD NOTES FROM

hand there were signs of the German intention to make stands in order to delay the Russian advance. At one point, about ten kilometres from Skierniewice, an extremely elaborate position had been prepared with the thoroughness which marks all the German field work. Trees had been felled across the road which presented a veritable abatis for the advance of artillery. Along the ridge deep trenches and gun positions had been thrown up. The whole presented as ideal a position for defence as one could imagine, with a clear sweep for gun fire as far as field artillery could possibly carry. Yet they never stopped even a day at this point; and it is now perfectly clear that their present policy is one of absolute withdrawal, with only such stands as are necessary to permit them to get conveniently out of the country with their impedimenta.

For another hour we drove on, and then came suddenly over a ridge on to the position itself. The battle at this point, which seems to have been a typical rearguard action, was just over; and the last belated shells of the retiring enemy were bursting sporadically to the west of us, with an occasional puff of shrapnel to the south, to indicate that we were close on the heels of the troops. The little village behind the position was alive with the activities that one always finds at the extreme front; Red Cross wagons,



A Battlefield in Poland.



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

transport, wounded being carried back on stretchers, and the thousand and one odds and ends of confusion that go to make up the fringe of war. Behind the village, six horses to the team, with drivers lolling in their saddles chatting and smoking, were drawn up the limbers of two batteries; while off in a dip in the country to the north were three or four battalions of reserves. The inhabitants were just beginning to come out of their holes, and everybody was comparing notes as to the damage done by the German shell fire. Here and there a wrecked house or a dead horse slashed open with a fragment of shell, attracted little groups of the natives, who excitedly discussed it all.

The street was congested with soldiers, wounded, transport, and men, women, and children of the population. Just at the outskirts of the town one came on the position itself, with the long lines of trenches, and here and there hurriedly-erected bombproofs for the officers. The soldiers, after their fight, were just coming out of their burrows and comparing their experiences. Across the main road to the north were the Russian gun positions, with the long, sleek noses of the field guns showing out of their earth embrasures; while the gunners were packing up their used shell cases, and the officers were making up their daily reports of ammunition

## FIELD NOTES FROM

expended and losses incurred. Farther to the north was another line of trenches, and, beyond that, more guns. This particular action in an ordinary campaign might be worth notice, but in this stupendous conflict it must go down as merely one of the thousand details which make up a campaign over a front measured in extent by hundreds of kilometres.

The fight in question was a German rearguard action which detained the Russians but a day or two. These fights are typical of all. Troops piled forward and entrenched; artillery shoved up into position, and then a rain of shell fire on the enemy, until the moment is ripe for the infantry to take their turn with the bayonet. The fighting in this district indicates a good bit of this work done, and a few thousand metres beyond the trenches there is a wood which the Russians carried with a bayonet charge which was actually carried home, as some 300 German dead showed conclusively. When the action had finished, the troops that had borne the brunt of it remained on the field, while fresh ones were moved forward to take care of the next day's fighting farther to the west.

The statement which has been made repeatedly, that the Germans are robbing the cradle and the grave to fill their firing line, seems justified by the evidence in the wood above mentioned.

## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

From the military record book of one soldier torn to fragments by a bit of shell appeared the date of his birth—"1900." Certainly it is indicative of strenuous efforts at recruiting, when boys of fourteen are in the line performing the work of grown men. Others were between thirty and forty, from which one must conclude that a very large portion of the army that is now retiring is composed of the second and third line. I neither heard of nor saw Austrian dead, wounded, or prisoners, in this vicinity.

A few miles to the west we came on a village that lay in the wake of the German retreat, burned to the ground; probably as the result of shell fire and subsequent spreading of the flames. Here and there a dead horse or cow lying about in the front yards indicated that shrapnel had been flying. It was just getting dark as we entered the village; and here as elsewhere near the front the inhabitants, stunned with the disaster that had befallen them, were wandering about among the ruins. Women with babies in their arms sat in a kind of dazed bewilderment on the sills of doors which were all that remained of what had been their homes but yesterday. Cows were wandering aimlessly about, trying to find the former byres where at just this hour they had been wont to come to be milked and bedded down for the night. These sights are all very

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painful, but are, I suppose, of the inevitable consequences of war.

These destroyed villages, in almost every instance, I believe, are the outcome of rallies made by the retiring troops and resulting shell fire by the pursuing victors. When these stands are made, it is, of course, the only recourse of the Russians to shell them out of their temporary shelter. For a country however which has been the scene of so much fighting I find this in exceptionally good condition. The abundance of live stock on every hand certainly indicates that the Germans have not wantonly looted the villages through which their armies have now passed twice. Even burned villages are comparatively rare.

One naturally expected restraint from the Germans in their advance, for no sound general would permit his soldiery to incur the hatred of a population which he was leaving in his rear. But that the same policy of restraint, excepting a few isolated instances, should have been followed in a retreat after a collapse of the campaign, indicates pretty clearly that the Germans have seen a new light as to the methods of conducting warfare. Perhaps the fact that we have over here larger numbers of reserves and Landsturm men has some significance as well; for the older men who are married and have families of their own



German Prisoner and his Russian Guard,



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

in Germany, are much less apt to run rampant with the torch than the boys of the first line, to whom war is a great adventure. Perhaps also the respect for a brave and stubborn enemy which is growing up on both sides, is doing a great deal to lessen the personal bitterness which characterized the war at its beginning. Certainly I have seen or heard nothing here or in the Galician country which can in any way be compared to the campaign conducted by the Germans in Belgium.

Realization is no doubt creeping in, that after all Europe has some future when the war is over, and the family of nations on the Continent have eventually got to live together on terms of peace. I think it a very excellent sign, then, that the hatred and personal bitterness on each side, which gave every soldier the lust and ambition to cut the throat of each individual of the enemy he met, is gradually fading away into the legitimate aim of war. The close intermingling of soldiers and population of foreign countries certainly brings a realization to each, that after all the enemy are but men like themselves, neither much better nor much worse. Thus, in mutual respect and association, there grows up throughout a war a feeling which, when peace actually comes, will make possible better relations than existed in the period preceding hostilities. As examples of

## FIELD NOTES FROM THE RUSSIAN FRONT

this, witness the present relations just now of Russia and Japan, or England and the Boers. The feeling I mention, which is, I believe, slowly and subtly developing in all the armies over here, is one of the few bright spots in a conflict which reeks with horrors and misery.

A RELIGIOUS SERVICE ON THE  
FIELD OF BATTLE

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL  
WASHINGTON, D. C.





Service on the Battlefield: a Prayer.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A RELIGIOUS SERVICE ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE

WARSAW, POLAND,

*November 1, 1914.*

HE who tries to understand the psychology of the millions of simple soldiers of the Czar now with the colours, and overlooks the spiritual aspect of these humble privates, certainly fails to appreciate one of the keynotes in the character of the men who are carrying forward the honour and the banners of Russia towards a victorious consummation of the war. I never began to realize this extraordinary quality of the Russian soldier, until by rare good luck we happened a few days ago on services which were being held on the battlefield near a certain village in Western Poland.

The sun had set and the whole landscape was fading into the neutral tints of the afterglow of a cold afternoon in late October. A few hundred yards to the west was the line of the Russian trenches and the position of their field artillery,

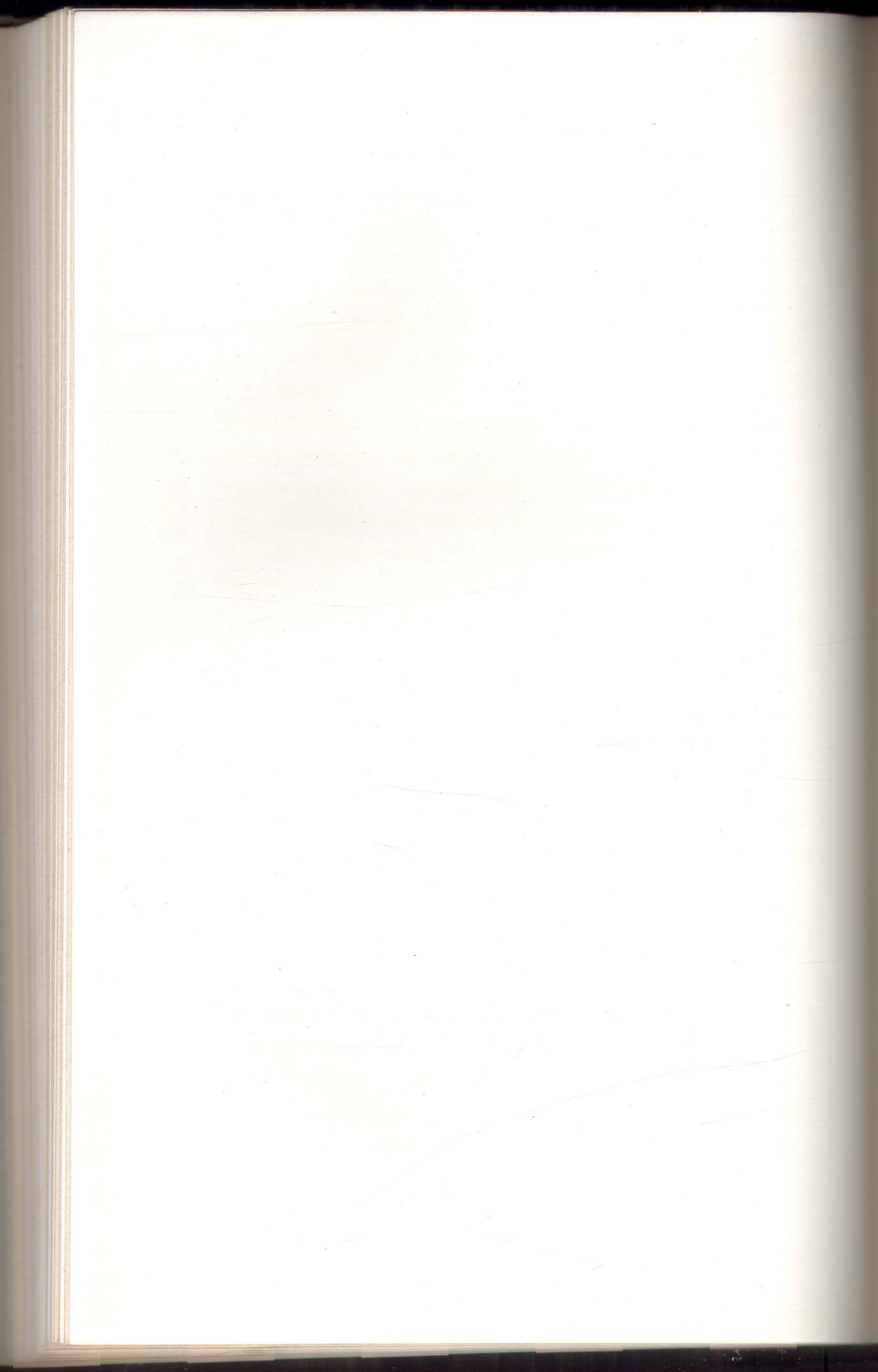
## FIELD NOTES FROM

whose guns were hardly cool from the discharge of shrapnel shells. The last stretcher-bearers were disappearing to the rear with their melancholy burdens, while in a wood a few miles away the still bleeding bodies of the enemy's dead were stiffening in death. A few kilometres beyond, belated shells, like the last fire cracker in a pack, were bursting at infrequent intervals. The battle was over, and here we saw the change from the militant to the religious. The regiment in question was one of those from Siberia whose deeds of valour in eighteen days of consecutive fighting reduced its numbers from 4,000 to 1,700, and its officers from 70 to 12. The fame of their endurance and prodigies of courage had trickled back to the General Staff, and the Grand Duke had himself sent a wire of congratulations to the regiment, and ordered that it should be decorated with the Cross of St. George, the nearest equivalent to the V.C. which Russian tradition offers. This order is given only for bravery in action. Representing the regiment so honoured, forty soldiers, selected by their own comrades, receive the cherished little metal cross with its bit of black and orange ribbon.

The regiment that we now saw in the slowly dying October day had thus been honoured; and almost ere their rifles were cool, were ordered back into a little hollow dip to hear the message



Service on the Battlefield : Soldiers at Prayer.



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

of the Commander-in-Chief, to receive their reward, and to participate in religious services conducted by a priest of their own faith.

The scene was one that I shall never forget.

Seventeen hundred war-worn veterans, covered with the mud and dirt of the trenches, massed in a half-square in all the atmosphere of battle. But the hard glint of cruel war was gone from their eyes, and in its place there shone that peculiar exaltation of the religious man in the presence of the chosen representative of his creed.

And such a representative! In the very centre of the square, with the entire staff of the regimental officers grouped bareheaded behind him, stood the most magnificent priest that I have ever seen. With golden hair hanging down to his shoulders, and a head transfigured with the light of one lifted above earthly matters, he stood in all his gorgeous robes before six stacked rifles, the bayonets of which served to support the Holy Bible and the golden cross that symbolizes the Christian faith. With eyes turned in rapture to the cold leaden heavens above him, the priest seemed a figure utterly detached from the earth. Behind him stood a few grimy veterans whose voices made them eligible to aid in the chanting. And on two sides, file upon file, leaning on their rifles with bayonets fixed, stood these sons of Russia's vast domain of steppes and desolation which sweeps from the Ural

## FIELD NOTES FROM

Mountains to the far fringes of the Pacific littoral in Asia.

The service I could not follow, as it was of course in Russian, but the spirit of it, there in the chill twilight upon the battlefield, was such as none could misread. And when there came the benediction, each of the soldiers fell upon his knees and with bended head listened to the sonorous voice that bespoke for them the mercy and kindness of Him who above the roar and tumult of battle and conflicting races yet watches over every one of His own. As they knelt there with their forest of bayonets silhouetted against the sky, it seemed as though the gleaming points must be part of a religious service, and not the type of war's most cruel weapon. The service ended, and then followed a scene almost as impressive. The colonel, a grizzled old warrior, stepped out and in sharp, military sentences ordered from the ranks those of the privates who had been honoured with the Cross of St. George. The men stepped forward and kissed the cross held in the hands of the priest. Next, the forty were formed in a line of twenty, two files deep. An officer then called out certain orders, and at once the sea of bayonets dissolved in a confusion of defiling columns, and at another order reshaped into the whole regiment in column of eights, with the colonel at their head. These then defiled past



Service on the Battlefield: placing Prayer-Book on Bayonets.



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

the new Knights of St. George to pay their respects to those among them who had borne the test of fire and of steel.

The first man was the old, grizzled colonel. In his left hand he carried a cane to support a foot which limped from a wound received in Manchuria. As he passed his own privates, he raised his hand in respectful salute. Behind him filed the whole regiment, company after company, each paying the respect that manhood renders to fortitude and bravery crowned by official recognition. And all the while the forty chosen ones stood with radiant faces, their rifles at the present. Here we saw them file past, these ragged, war-stained men from Siberia, and a finer body of troops more representative of their craft has never come before my eyes. Dirty, bearded, and jingling with their teapots, spades, and soldiers' knick-knacks, they moved slowly past their companions whom they had chosen to honour as types of their own bravery. When the last company had passed, the deep, stern tones of the colonel rang out, and at once the regiment dissolved into its companies, each of which returned to the place in the trenches from whence it had come to participate in this remarkable meeting. After it was over, I strolled along the lines and there sank into my mind the realization that these simple men had gone back to their trenches armed with a faith

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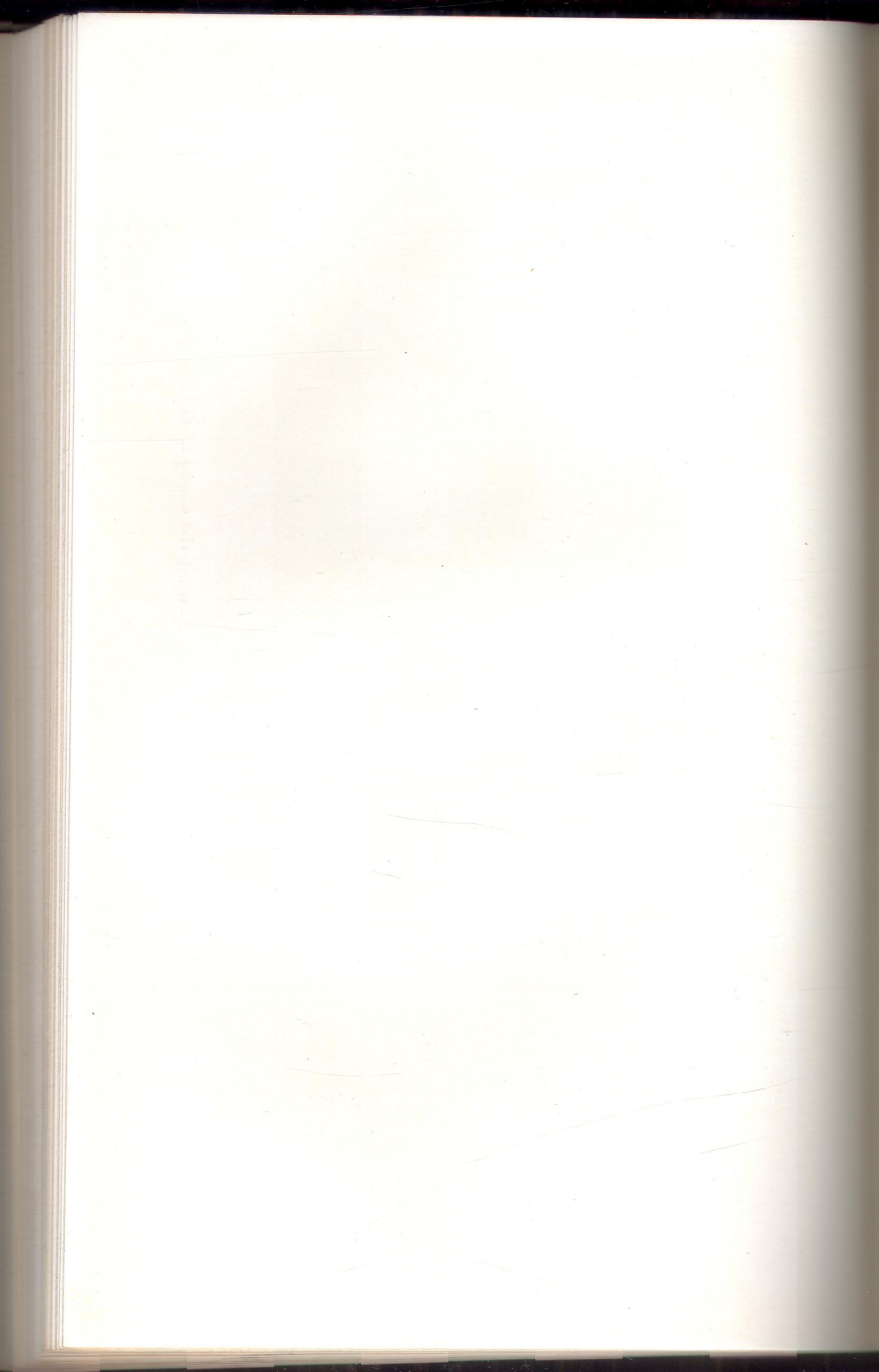
and an ardour which only religion sown on a fertile ground can stir in the breast of man.

I learn now that priests are with nearly all the armies, and services are held as frequently as possible, and that during the action these men of God move among the troops, administering the last offices to those that are beyond earthly help, and binding up the wounds of those whose condition is not hopeless.

The spirit of the troops is perhaps typified by the scene that I have imperfectly tried to describe. Let no one who would understand the temperament and capacity of the Russian soldier forget, that in the very aspect seen here, there is one of the greatest assets that an army can have, when it is embodied in the heart of each of the simple units that forms its regiments, the men who pay the price of war and whose lives and shattered carcasses form the foundation of the highway of advancing Empire.



Service on the Battlefield: Priest showing the Cross to the Troops.



SCENES ON THE ROAD IN POLAND

WINTER ON THE ROAD IN IOWA

## CHAPTER XIV

### SCENES ON THE ROAD IN POLAND

*Dated November 2, 1914,  
From RADUM, POLAND.*

WHAT I have seen to-day was not spectacular, but to one who has followed armies in the field, it was the most encouraging sight for a sympathizer of the Allies that he could possibly wish to behold. We have covered in and around here perhaps two hundred kilometres of road in our motor-cars, and never have I seen such signs of preparation for an aggressive movement. It is not an exaggeration to say that there are on the road to-day in our immediate vicinity, transport, munitions, and troops that if strung in a single line would extend for at least a hundred kilometres in length. All day long I have witnessed a continuous procession of everything that goes to make for war. Russia may have been a little slow in getting under way, but one feels here that she is not the less sure for all that.

One thing which impresses me greatly is the

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enormous amount of shrapnel caissons one sees compared to transport loaded with small-arm ammunition. Certainly there has never been a war where artillery played such an important rôle as in this ; and I think I do not exaggerate when I state that I have seen, in the last few days, fully a thousand six-horse teams with the ammunition caissons going to the front. And not only are they strung out for miles along the roads, but at frequent intervals one sees whole parks of them, covering acres of ground, with the little shaggy horses tethered in long rows to ropes. Every village is filled with hundreds of transport carts, while in and around and between one sees nothing but soldiers of every branch of the service. I do not know how many times to-day we have had to slow down our car to drive through the endless columns of men in leaden grey, who obligingly made a pathway through which we might move forward.

The Russian regiments on the march are the most informal organizations in the world. Ahead ride a few officers, and then in no particular formation come the troops : some on one side of the road and some on the other. Towards the rear they straggle off in dwindling streams, wandering about the fields, and plodding here and there as though they were all off on individual tours and each was on his own account.



Transport passing through a Polish Village.



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

For miles after a regiment has passed one sees little groups trudging along, apparently perfectly detached and without any idea of their destination. Yet at night, to a man, they are all there for rations, and in the morning start off again in a solid formation.

I am told that this method of marching has proved a great puzzle to the aviators of the Germans trying to estimate the numbers of troops that are moving; for when the columns are so strung out, it is almost impossible from any height to tell whether what one sees is a battalion in close formation or a company strung out. Most armies march in solid masses, which can be seen on the roads for long distances and their strength judged to a nicety.

The more one sees of the individual of the Russian army the more one comes to like the common soldier here. They are the most good-natured, child-like, playful creatures in the world; and in the month I have been with the army, in constant association with troops, I have not seen a single fight among the soldiers or any disorder whatsoever. On the road and in their camps at night, all seem contented and happy when the weather is fine. It must be admitted that they look a little dismal in the rain.

For the first time on this trip we have seen considerable numbers of Cossacks, and have talked

## FIELD NOTES FROM

with a lot of them. Personally I am of the opinion that the terrible name given to the Cossacks is a libel. There may be undesirable individuals, but most of them that I have seen have been great overgrown children. Incidentally, I am gradually forming a similar impression of the Uhlans that I have seen. They may be quite different men on the other frontier, but those that have been taken prisoners here by the Russians are anything but terrifying to look at. Most of them that I have seen are very young, and look like schoolboys in uniform rather than the demons incarnate that I have read so much about since the war started.

We have travelled over some very bad roads, and the other day when we were stuck in a bad place where the bridges had been destroyed by the retreating Germans, and a detour had to be made, we were rescued by these very same prisoners, who came along just in the nick of time. During the delay in getting us out, I had a chat with both Germans and Austrians among the group of four or five hundred. I asked the Germans how they felt about the Russians, and how they had been treated. They agreed in the same breath that they liked them and that they had been treated very well. The Austrians said the same. The convoy accompanying this substantial block of captured men was not above a dozen Russian



A Cossack Patrol.



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

soldiers. While some forty prisoners were trying to get our motor-cars out of the mud, one of the Russian soldiers came up with a few Austrians and asked each of our party in turn if we could not help a friend to change Austrian silver to Russian money. All fraternized together, and it is hard to believe that these men have the slightest personal animus against each other. As the war drags out, such bitterness as there is, is becoming less and less seen.

There were two very intelligent Germans in the crowd, and I talked for some time with them. Both were reservists: one was a merchant from Berlin, and the other, in time of peace, a carpenter. I asked them how the army talked about the war. "Oh, we shall win all right," the merchant said. "You know of course that France is already practically finished, and we have only Russia now, and we knew that would take some time." "How about England?" I asked. "You know of course that she has a new army of a million men that will go into the field before long." The two men turned and looked at each other. It was evident that neither of them knew anything about it at all, and their faces fell accordingly.

I talked with still a third, who confided to me that he was a coachman in time of peace, but that all things considered he infinitely preferred war to his last job.

## FIELD NOTES FROM

I am constantly inquiring among all for cases of atrocities, but I have not yet found one of which the evidence was clear or conclusive. One is constantly being told that Germans have committed this or that horrible deed, but upon examination I have never found a single individual who had seen it himself. He had always heard it from some one, who had got it from a soldier, who saw it at a distance, or who was told by some one else. Of the situation on the other side, or in Eastern Prussia, I would not presume to speak, for I have not been in those theatres of war; but of what I have seen along the fronts in Galicia and Poland I do not believe that any excesses, excepting occasional isolated cases, are being practised on either side.

War at its very best is hideous enough, and certainly no good can come from taking the few isolated incidents, magnifying them and treating them as typical, and then giving them out to both sides. I do not think at present one could find many soldiers on this front on either side who have much to complain of at the hands of their enemy when captured. I believe the Germans here are conducting a very decent campaign, and I am certain that the Russians are doing the same.

One cannot overestimate the marvellous effect that the abolition of drink has had upon this army. It may be trite to write about it, but

## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

the more one lives with these men the more one comes to wonder at the sobriety and absolute quiet and order of the army, both men and officers.

The organization of the transport service is excellent, and in all the miles of wagons I have seen in the past few days I have not seen one broken down, nor have I seen any congestion on the road. Everything is moving like clockwork, and any one who doubts that the Russian Army has been reorganized from the ground up, has only to spend a month or two studying it to realize his mistake.

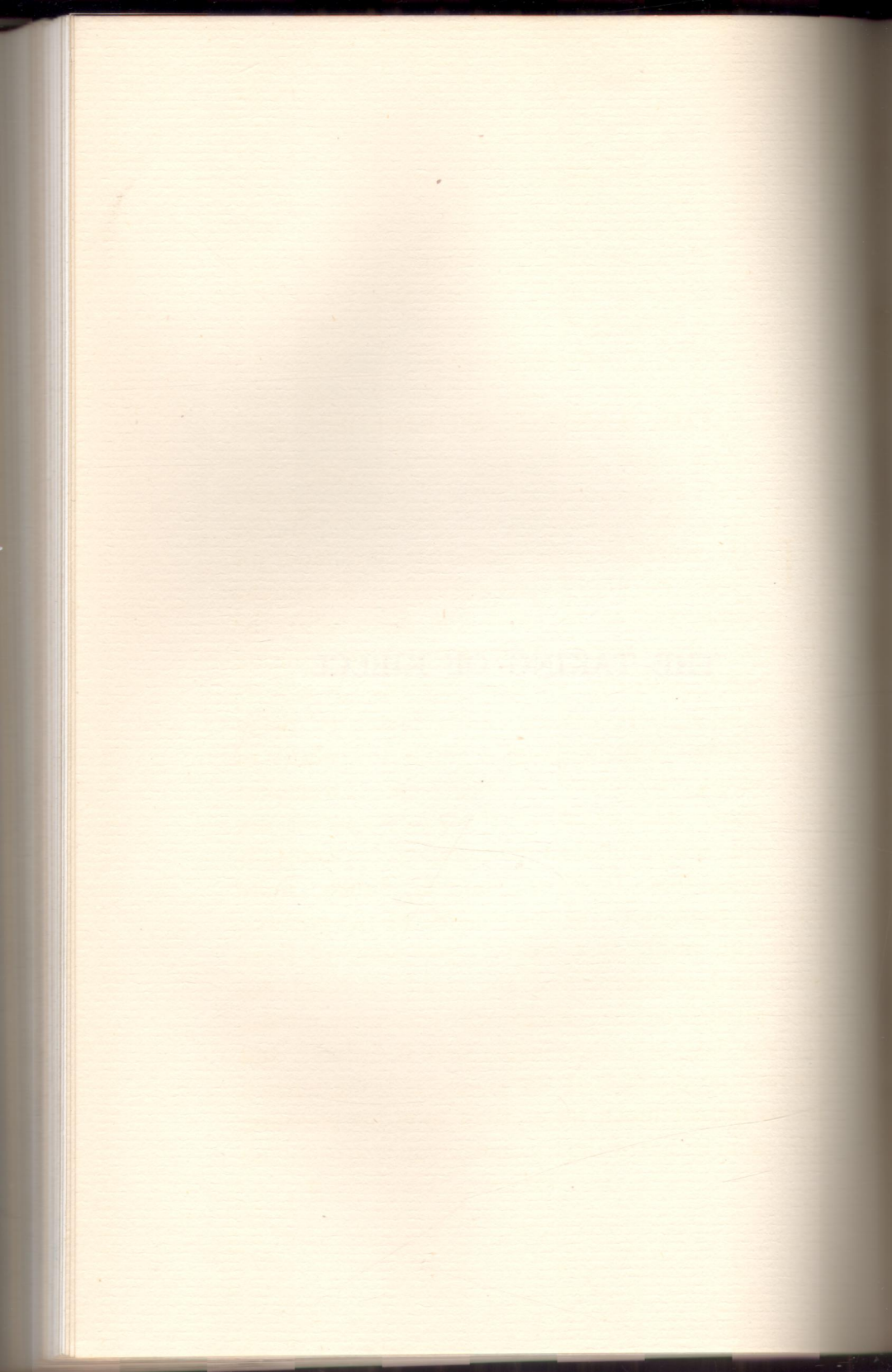
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THE TAKING OF KIELCE



## CHAPTER XV

### THE TAKING OF KIELCE

KIELCE, POLAND,  
*November 3, 1914.*

THE Russians took Kielce to-day, and for once we were far enough forward to make it possible for us to enter the town with the troops. The action itself took place during the night, and, like all these fights, was a rear-guard affair, arranged by the Germans to delay the Russian advance long enough to permit of the easy retirement of their own transport and guns. The troops of the Czar, however, are in such spirits and so encouraged by constant advances, that they are moving much more rapidly than suits the convenience of the enemy ; with the result that by necessity some of these rearguard events assume the stubborn resistance of a pitched battle. Kielce was extremely intense for the day, or rather night, that it lasted ; and there is no doubt that the enemy is being hurried in his retreat much faster than suits his pleasure. The main bodies of the Russian advance are moving

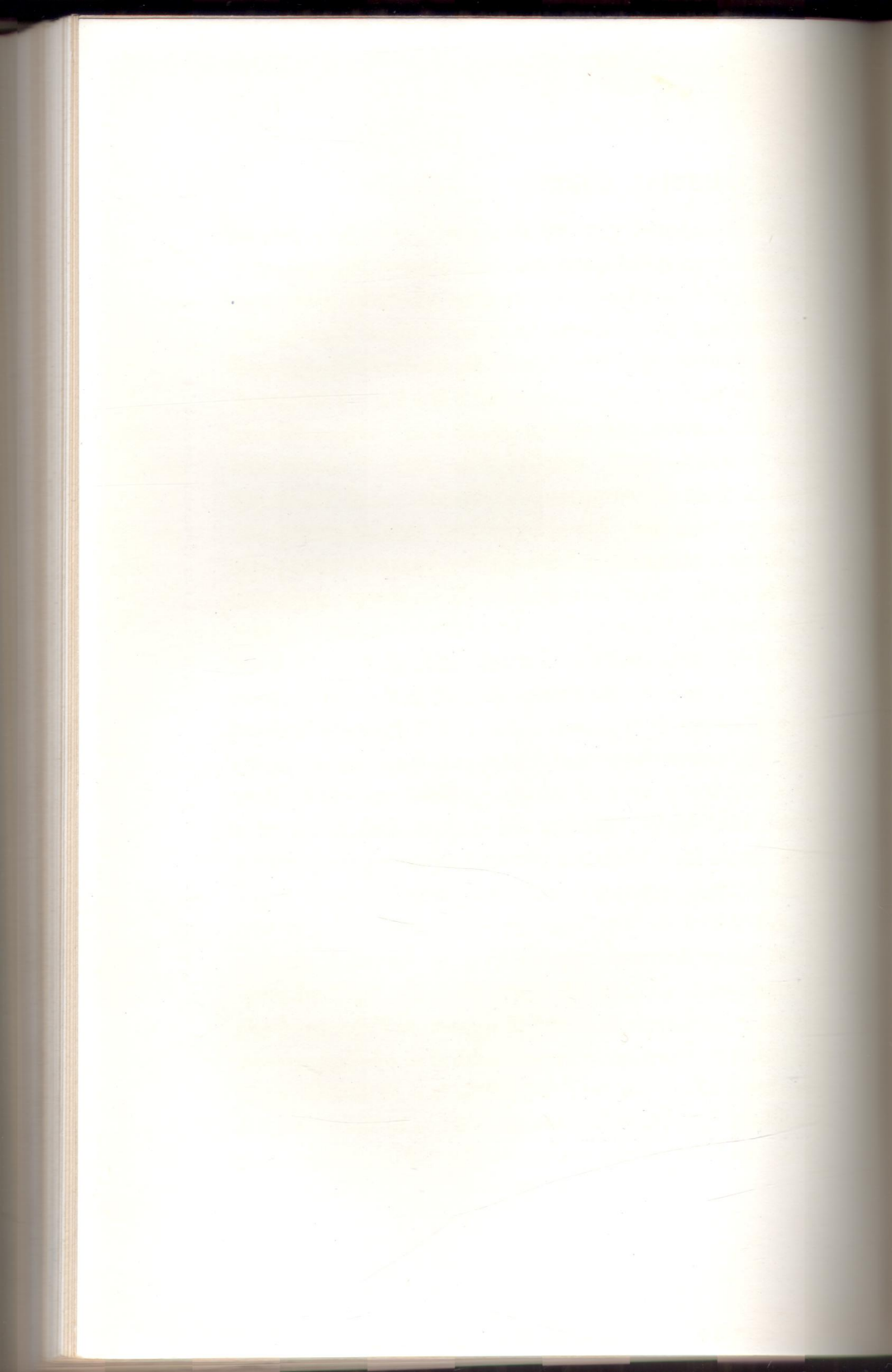
## FIELD NOTES FROM

from twenty to twenty-five kilometres a day at present, while some of the flank regiments cover up to forty kilometres a day. The stands that are being made are smothered almost instantly with the volume of our troops that roll over the defence like the waves of the sea. The Kielce fight got under way a little late yesterday, but the Russians did not wait until daylight, but with ferocious eagerness attacked the Austrian centre at a village ten kilometres from here, and crumpled up the whole line, with the result that the retirement was made in a hurry. The last troops of the enemy left the town itself at ten in the morning, and we entered with the Russian soldiers a little past noon.

We were told at Radum, where we spent the night, that there would be a fight to-day at Kielce, and that we could go forward and see it. So we got an early start in our motor-cars and headed for the front, a distance of about fifty kilometres. The roads, however, were in a very bad state, thanks to the efforts of the retreating enemy, who had had sufficient leisure here to run ploughs through the beautiful macadam road, and burn or blow up all the bridges and culverts on the way. Every few miles it was necessary to make detours through fields and over hurriedly-thrown-together bridges. Again and again we stuck in the mud up to the axles; and now we began to realize the convenience of being attached to the General Staff and having



Occupation of Kielce by the Russians during the German Retreat in Poland.



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

a Staff colonel as our leader. Every time we came to grief we had only to wait until the next company of troops or transport hove in sight, when they suspended the war against the enemy long enough to come down a hundred strong and pull us bodily out of our predicament. The result of the delays, however, was that what should have taken us a couple of hours took nearly five. The density of the traffic and transport made travel slow even where the roads were good.

As the morning advanced we began to pass the carts of wounded, and a hundred other unmistakable signs of the real front came in sight. A few miles from town we became wedged in the road with the whole vanguard of the army pouring in from the fields on each side; and then we learned for the first time that the town had been taken and that the troops surging about us were those that had been fighting all night, and that, as a matter of fact, their first columns were just pressing in on the very heels of the enemy.

Ahead of us, the road was blocked with troops and Cossack cavalry, all swinging forward, singing songs and otherwise rejoicing at the advance after a brisk night's work. Just behind us there trotted in from the lanes, from the east and west, battery after battery of artillery, fresh with the mud and grime of their night's work in the positions. The soldiers were sitting on the limbers munching

## FIELD NOTES FROM

bread and shouting exuberantly at each other. These guns, we learned, had just been limbered up and were pushing forward to re-engage the enemy as soon as he could be overtaken. They had all been snatched out of their positions and hurried forward so rapidly that each piece and caisson was like a Christmas tree, with the odds and ends belonging to the soldiers that they had not had time to leave for the transport. Bales of hay hurriedly thrown on between gun and caisson, teapots and clothing, relics of the Austrian retreat, horses' nosebags, drinking-cups, and a thousand other intimate effects of the gunners jingled and rattled against the barrel of the gun itself, its muzzle now neatly capped with leather.

We entered the town surrounded by a forest of bayonets, with transport, cavalry, and ammunition wagons pouring through every street. A colonel of infantry on a big white horse, who was trying to get his own regimental transport forward through and out of the town, tried to stop our car; but when he saw the Staff shoulder-straps of our colonel, he grudgingly stopped his transport and let us slide through into the square of the town. The population were hanging out of the crowded windows and balconies. Russian flags were flying from almost every house. If I had any doubt before this day as to whether the feelings of Poland were for or against Russia,



Russian Field Gun in Action (Poland).



## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

it would have been dissipated in this square. There was no doubt about the enthusiasm with which the Russian troops were received.

We drove our cars down to the hotel, now the headquarters of the general commanding the army corps. The Staff was already there, having luncheon, and as we entered they were all on their feet singing in their deep, hoarse voices the stirring Russian National Anthem. After a hasty bite, we went back to the square, and watched the avalanche of men that was pouring through the town.

They are impressive, these soldiers of the Czar, without a doubt. Here is no pomp and no brilliant show of uniform for officers and men. All is soberly practical; and as one stands for hours and watches them swinging through the streets in their dirty, grey coats, stained with the mud and dirt of battlefield and trench; with unshaven faces, and their teakettles and canteens jingling about them, the conviction grows that this army of Russia which is now pushing forward everywhere, is probably going to be the great deciding factor in this greatest of all wars. All the afternoon the columns were pouring through the square, with breaks every now and again; the soldiers splitting their ranks to let the six-horse teams drawing the long sleek guns, with their paint blistered off from the heat of rapid fire, pass through to the

## FIELD NOTES FROM

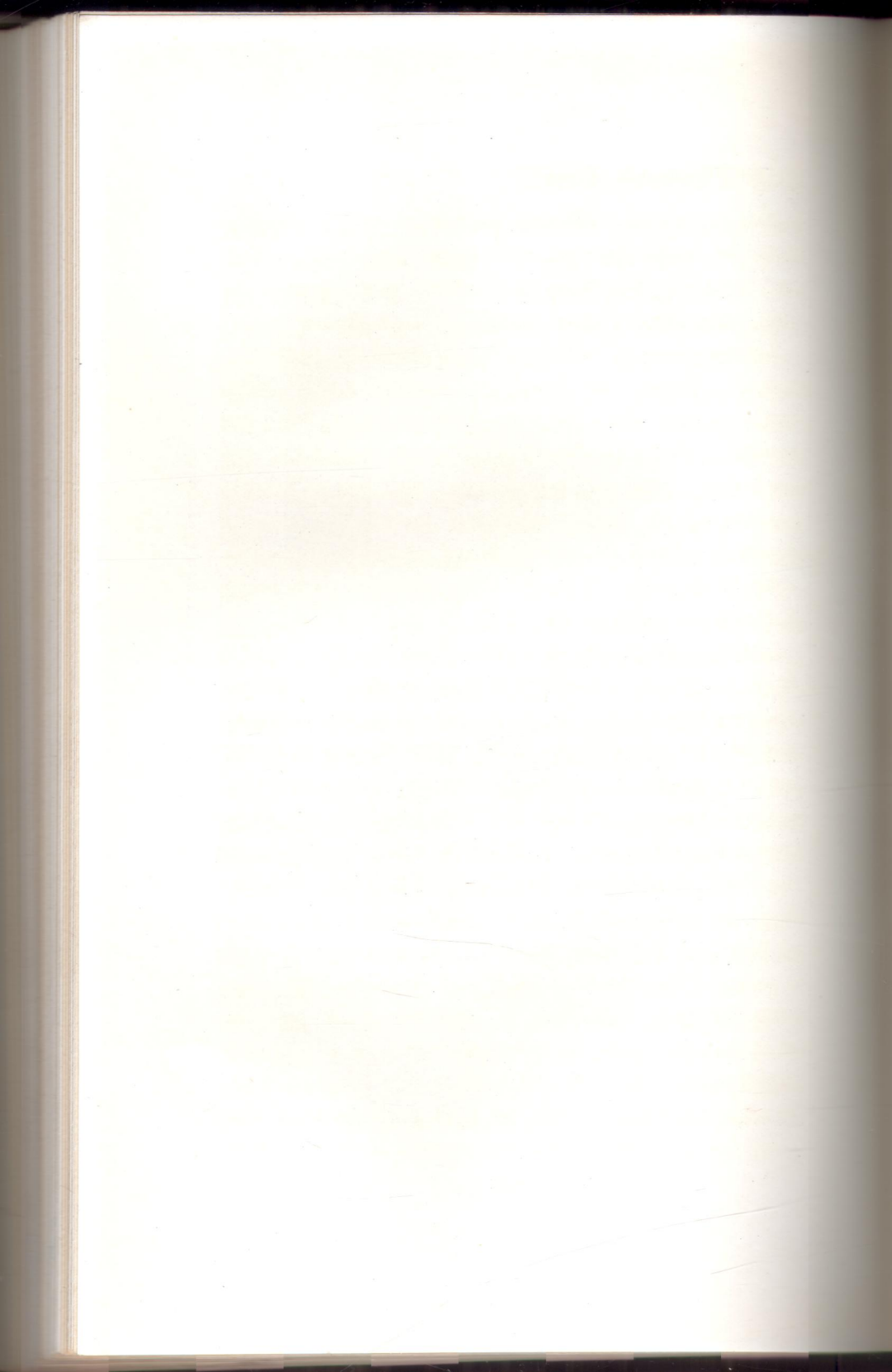
front. As the daylight began to fade, the columns of troops began to dwindle and give place to the endless stream of transport that seethed in its wake; and then, away to the south and west, came the sullen report of a gun, and then another and another and another, and presently the air was filled with the distant rumble of artillery fire.

We knew that the guns that had passed us on the road had already caught up with the enemy, and that his rearguard was again being pressed. But we unfortunately were now rounded up by our gentle but exceedingly firm colonel, and advised that we could not go any farther for the present, but must remain in the town. To ease our restlessness we were taken round after dinner to-night and presented to the general commanding the advance in this quarter. We spent half or three-quarters of an hour in his room at the hotel, the corridors of which were filled with aides and muddy orderlies coming and going.

One is much impressed with the seriousness with which these men are taking their job. The general in command had a small room, and a kit much less extensive than most of the war correspondents of our party maintain as necessaries. A table strewn with military maps covered with pencil marks indicated the plans for the next day, and a fuming, unshaven division general, covered with mud, talking to an equally soiled Staff colonel



Russian Field Gun in Action (Polard).



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in the corner of the room, indicated pretty clearly that we were not opportune in our visit. Yet the General commanding received us very courteously and kept us for nearly half an hour.

Before going to bed we took a stroll through the streets. Where at noon one could hardly pass for the congestion, there was now order and organization. The wave had rolled on, and already the front was twenty kilometres beyond us, and only the transport and occasional bodies of troops coming in from distant positions remained to tell of the deluge that had swept through this extremely picturesque little Polish city in the morning.

During our short stop here I have made every effort to secure all information possible from the villagers about the German and Austrian occupation of the place. We learn that they had been here for weeks, and that the retreat was a surprise to the Germans, but has not apparently had a very depressing effect on the soldiers, who maintain an absolute confidence in their ultimate victory. Huge supplies were accumulated here, and the inhabitants say that many of the enemy expected to winter in Kielce. German soldiers are apparently very gullible. I suppose it is against their military law to question even in their own minds what has been told them by their officers. In any case, they seem to believe here that the retreat from Warsaw was not a very serious matter

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and to have explained to the inhabitants that an early winter and cold weather had made it inconvenient, and that they were going home temporarily and would call later again in the spring.

From conversations with prisoners and with the people here, who seem to have had little trouble with the visitors, it is obvious that the rank and file of the Germans have been led to believe that the war in the West is practically all over but the shouting, and that it is merely a question of time when Russia will be disposed of. The belief is that they have done the hard job in France already, and now they will digest Russia at their leisure. The confidence of the Germans seems to have been shared by many of the inhabitants, who had gloomily come to share the same point of view. As one man said to me, "We had come to think the Germans were invincible. For weeks we have seen nothing but German and Austrian troops, artillery, and transport. There were so many of them, and all in such fine condition and so confident, that it did not seem possible they could be defeated. I had about given up hope, but now it is quite a different outlook," and he pointed out on the square filled with Russian bayonets moving in and swaying in unison through the street. Then he added significantly, "Is there no end of them? This early morning this whole square was blue with Austrian

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uniforms. It seems like a dream to see nothing now but Russians." I asked him about the Germans. They, it seems, took their departure the afternoon before, leaving their allies of the Dual Monarchy to take up the burden of the rearguard.

From many conversations that I have had, it seems clear that the relations between the soldiers, and especially the officers, of the Germans and Austrians are not cordial, to put it mildly ; and there is a growing breach between them, which may yet prove to be of great significance before this war is over. The Germans are constantly forcing their allies into the bad places, and making them take up the thankless burden of rearguard duty, with the heavy losses in wounded and prisoners that follow, while the Germans themselves slip out with their transport. It is reported, and seems probable, that many German officers have been sprinkled through the Austrian regiments, and that these treat their Austrian fellow-officers with arrogance and contempt, which is creating dissatisfaction and intense annoyance. Quarrels and recrimination between them seem to be general, and if the reports that we hear are true, it is easily believable that the Austrians are getting sick of the job allotted them by their allies of pulling their chestnuts out of the fire.

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The spirit of the Austrian troops on this front is certainly at a very low ebb, and this accounts in part for the very large numbers of prisoners taken in every action now. We are told that they surrender in blocks, and that substantial bodies have come in with native guides to the Russian lines asking to be received. These stories are, however, given us by the Russians themselves, and I cannot vouch for their accuracy. All that I have written above must be taken merely as indicating a general trend of opinion, and accepted for what it is worth, and not as authoritative in any way. I believe, however, that the relations between Germany and Austria are worth watching ; and it is within the realm of possibility that Austria, sick of her assignment of holding back the Russians, which she is striving to do under great difficulty, heavy losses and no appreciation, may yet ask for terms of peace independently of her ally, an event which would certainly put the Germans in a desperate plight.

Among the hundreds and hundreds of Austrian prisoners and wounded that I have seen in the past few days, there have been but a handful of Germans. These hold themselves absolutely aloof from their Austrian fellow-captives, and their relations with them seem much more hostile than with the Russian guards that accompany them. Many of the captured Austrians are Poles from



Austrian Prisoners resting by the Road-side.



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Galicia, and they do not even pretend to have enthusiasm for, or interest in the war.

Russian sources here offer us tales of German atrocities, but on being investigated I find little ground for accepting any large portion of them. We were told, for instance, by a colonel, with great seriousness, that the Germans were wantonly butchering prisoners. Seventeen captured Cossacks, he told us, were lined up, and a German officer went down the line shooting them with his revolver one after the other. What was the evidence? A Cossack soldier said he had seen it all from a wood a mile away. No confirmation of this remarkable tale came from any other quarter; yet I noticed that the story was set down seriously by some of our party, and no doubt will go out as an authoritative statement.

I am constantly hearing similar tales. One was told me the other day of a drummer boy being captured and blown to bits by rifle bullets. What was the evidence? A man in the street had heard it from a soldier who was told by an eye-witness. And so on. It is of course difficult to follow these stories to their foundation, but personally I think the atrocity tales, unless absolutely proven, should be handled with great care. Rumours unverified and sent out as typical facts serve only to mislead the public, and inflame the soldiery to take reprisals for supposed excesses, which I honestly

## FIELD NOTES FROM THE RUSSIAN FRONT

believe, in nine cases out of ten, are entirely made up. From the population one finds only minor complaints, such as quarrels over exchange between marks and roubles, underpayment for rooms, etc. That the population found the Germans arrogant and overbearing is undoubtedly true, but beyond that I believe their occupation has been as decent as is possible in war.



Russian Infantry passing through Kielce, following up the German Retreat from Warsaw.



THE FIGHTING AROUND IVANGROD

THE MOUNTAIN AREA AND HAVASUPAI

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FIGHTING AROUND IVANGROD

WARSAW,

November 8, 1914.

TWO weeks in Poland have given me an absolutely new impression of the armies of modern Russia. There is as much difference in organization, *moral*, and efficiency, between the armies which some of us saw in Manchuria ten years ago, and which crumpled up before the Imperial Guards of Japan at the battle of the Yalu, and the military machine that these past few weeks has been steadily and surely driving back the armies of Germany and Austria, as there was between the raw American recruits who stampeded at the battle of Bull Run in 1861 and the veterans that received the surrender of Lee at Appomatox four years later.

One who has lived with large armies in the field comes to look first of all at the great business side of the enterprise. In the public mind the soldier and the army is always judged from the spectacular point of view of the battlefield.

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But upon analysis one finds that the actual battle is merely the fruition of all that has been carefully prepared and nourished during years that have gone before. An army may be likened to an iceberg, of which it is said that seven-eighths is submerged. What we see of troops is but the merest fraction of all that has gone before to prepare for the great spectacle of the battle itself. The action is merely the sudden crystallization of all that has been in solution during the decades that have preceded. That nation which has not been preparing the solution has nothing to crystallize when the hour strikes; and when the moment for action comes, too often finds its military house built upon the sands, which dissipate beneath it at the first impact. The battle is the tempest itself, and when the storm comes and the winds blow, the structure of an army, and indeed of the nation itself, survives or crumbles according to whether or not the foundations of preparation are true or loose and disjointed.

So it is that one looks first at the vast seething life that is going on behind the firing line, for herein he may judge of what to expect on the battlefield itself.

Until I went to Poland I had not during this war been actually in the life of the army itself. Of the efficiency of the German army, measured

## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

by the terrific blows that it had been striking, we all knew. Of the Russians, little was known save of their Galician campaign. But now at last, from the first day we entered the sphere of active and immediate operations, we had the chance of forming an opinion as to the quality of the soldiers of the Czar. This opinion, which in two days became a conviction, was that this army has been completely reorganized in ten years, and that it was now under full steam, with a momentum and efficiency almost incredible to those that had seen it ten years ago on the dismal plains of Manchuria.

For weeks there have been suggestions in the foreign press that Russia has been moving slowly; but that her slowness was the sign of sureness is the answer which one reads on the highways and byways of Poland to-day. I have seen the transport and the communications of a huge army in the Far East, but never have I seen or even dreamed of the sights that one sees daily on the lines of communications in Poland. One can take a motor-car and drive for hours along the beautiful macadam roads for a hundred kilometres, pass the almost unbroken line of transport, ammunition and artillery, intermingled with infantry and cavalry that is moving to the front. The ways are filled for mile after mile with the unbroken lines of all that

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goes to make for the execution of war. In many places they advance two abreast, and of the wagons containing the miscellany from which an army sucks its life, the numbers easily run into tens of thousands. And between, and around and about all, are ever the seething throngs of the soldiers themselves—these quiet, good-natured grey-coated units of the Czar, with their bayonets invariably fixed, moving forward in brigades, regiments, battalions, and companies. The picture of the road that always lingers in one's mind at night is this forest of bayonets as background for miles and miles of labouring caissons and creaking transport carts. From the first day that one is on the road, one feels absolutely certain that Russia has two of the great requisites of war—the organization and the men themselves. Organization, as I use it, means supplies and the efficient means of transporting them in a regular and orderly manner. Napoleon said that an army was composed of the material factors and of the moral components, and of these the latter was three times as important as the former. With every possible necessity, and with the last word in equipment, an army without *moral* is as a motor-car destitute of petrol.

There is no question about the Russians to-day. Two months ago, when I first came to Russia, I



Transport in Marsh Land.



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wrote a story from Petrograd in which I mentioned the new spirit of Russia and the willingness with which the troops were going to the war. After having been at the front and seen hundreds and thousands of the same soldiers on the roads, in the trenches, and in the hospitals, I am convinced that I did not exaggerate the spirit of new Russia. None of these pathetic units in the great game wanted the war, of course, and I suppose every one of them longs for its conclusion; but almost without exception they take it philosophically. Their hardships and their losses, their privations and their wounds—all are accepted as a matter of course. The absolute hopelessness which one saw on their faces in Manchuria is not seen in these days. The keynote of their appearance, wherever I have seen them in this war, is a good-natured willingness to accept what is necessary for the general cause the nature of which most of them understand.

The Russian soldier is to me the most philosophical individual in the world. I have seen him in the hospitals with arms and legs gone, head smashed in, ghastly wounds of all sorts, and if he has the strength to speak at all, he whispers "Nichivo," the equivalent of which in English is "What difference does it make, anyway?" After a glimpse of the men and the munitions that permeate the life behind the army, one is

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not surprised at the feats that these same men, backed by their organization and transport, are performing everyday on the actual field of battle. While it is true that many of the recent actions have been rearguard affairs, where it has been perfectly obvious that the enemy was making a stand only long enough to permit him to get out his impedimenta at his leisure, it is equally true that there have been other actions where he had not the slightest idea in the world of leaving unless he was forced.

The best illustration of this is the battle which seems to be known in a vague way as the battle of Ivangrod. I have asked many people in the last few days what they knew of this action. All seemed to be aware in a general way that it was an important Russian victory. Some said it was a German-Austrian rearguard action; but few seemed to know any of the details of the contest which, in any other war that this world has ever seen, would have filled books with its details of fierce hand-to-hand fighting. As far as I know there is nothing in the history of war, with the possible exception of the American battle of the Wilderness, that can touch this event I speak of; and the Virginia campaign, as regards losses, duration, and men engaged, was a mere skirmish compared with this. Yet here a few weeks afterwards, beyond the mere fact of it



Russian Advance Guard occupies Kielce.



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having taken place and having been won by the Russians, practically nothing is known about it.

I shall not attempt to describe the military or strategic aspects of this desperate spot, because if one begins on the historical relation of battles in this war there is absolutely no ending. I shall, however, sketch just a little of it, to indicate the nature of the work that the Russian soldiers did here. For in no battle of the whole war, on any front, has the fibre, determination and courage of troops been put more severely to the test than in this one.

The German programme, as has been pointed out, contemplated taking both Warsaw and Ivangrod and the holding for the winter of the line formed by the Vistula between the two. The Russians took the offensive from Ivangrod, crossed the river, and, after hideous fighting, fairly drove Austrians and Germans from positions of great strength around the quaint little Polish town of Kozenice. From this place, for perhaps ten miles west, and I know not how far north and south, there is a belt of forest of fir and spruce. I say forest, but perhaps jungle is a better term for it, for it is so dense with trees and underbrush that one can hardly see fifty feet away. Near Kozenice the Russian infantry, attacking in flank and front, fairly wrested the enemy's position and drove him back into this jungle. The front

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was itself bristling with guns, and I counted in about a mile position, forty-two guns. The taking of this line was in itself a test of the mettle of the Russian peasant soldier.

But this was only the beginning. Once in the wood, the Russian artillery was limited in its effect upon the enemy; and in any event, the few roads through the forest and the absence of open places made its use almost impossible. The enemy retired a little way into this wilderness and fortified. The Russians simply sent their troops in after them. The fight was now over a front of perhaps twenty kilometres. There was no strategy.

It was all very simple. In this belt were Germans and Austrians. They were to be driven out, if it took a month. The carnage began.

Day after day the Russians poured troops in on their side of the wood. These entered, were seen for a few minutes, then disappeared in the labyrinth of trees and were lost. Companies, regiments, battalions, and even brigades, were absolutely cut off from each other. None knew what was going on anywhere but a few feet in front. All knew that the only thing required of them was to keep advancing. This they did, foot by foot and day after day; fighting each other hand to hand; taking, losing and retaking position after position. In all of this ten kilometres of forest

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I dare venture to say there is hardly an acre without its trenches, rifle pits and graves.

Here one sees where a dozen men had a little fort of their own and fought furiously with the enemy a few feet away in a similar position. Day after day it went on, and day after day troops were poured into the Russian side of the wood; and day and night the continuous crack of rifle fire and the roar of artillery hurling shells into the wood, could be heard for miles. But the artillery played a lesser rôle, for the denseness of the forest made it impossible to get an effective range. Yet they kept at it, and the forest for miles looks as though a hurricane had swept through. Trees staggering from their shattered trunks, and limbs hanging everywhere, show where the shrapnel shells have been bursting. Yard by yard the ranks and lines of the enemy were driven back, but the nearer their retreat brought them to the open country west of the wood, the hotter the contest became; for each man in his own mind must have known how they would fare when, once driven from the protecting forest, they attempted to retreat through the open country without shelter.

The state of the last two kilometres of the woody belt is hard to describe. There seems scarcely an acre that is not sown like the scene of a paper chase, only the trail here is bloody

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bandages and bits of uniform. Here also there was small use for the artillery, and the rifle and the bayonet played the leading rôle. Men, fighting hand to hand with clubbed muskets and bayonets, fought from tree to tree and ditch to ditch. Systematically, patiently, stoically, the Russians sent in fresh troops at their side of the wood.

The end was of course inevitable. The troops of the Dual Alliance could not, I suppose, fill their losses, and the Russians could. Their army was under way, and they would have taken that belt of wood if the entire peasant population of Russia had been necessary to feed the maw of that ghastly monster of carnage in the forest. But at last the day came when the dirty, grimy, bloody soldiers of the Czar pushed their antagonists out of the far side of the belt of woodland. What a scene there must have been in this lovely bit of open country, with the quaint little village of Augustow at the cross-roads!

Once out in the open, the hungry guns of the Russians, that had for so long yapped ineffectively and sightlessly into blind forest, got their chance. Down every road through the wood, came the six-horse teams with the guns jumping and jingling behind, with their accompanying caissons heavy with shrapnel. The moment the enemy were in the clear, these batteries,

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eight guns to a unit, were unlimbered on the fringe of the wood and were pouring out their death and destruction on the wretched enemy now retreating hastily across the open.

The place where the Russians first turned loose on the retreat is a place to remember—or to forget, if one can. Dead horses, bits of men, blue uniforms, shattered transport, overturned gun carriages, bones, broken skulls, and grisly bits of humanity strew every acre of the ground. A Russian officer, who seemed to be in authority on this gruesome spot, volunteered the information that already they had buried at Kozienice in the wood and in the open 16,000 dead; and as far as I could make out the job was still a long way from being completed. Those who had fallen in the open, and along the road, had been decently interred, as the forests of crosses for ten miles along that bloody way clearly indicated; but back in the woods themselves, there were hundreds and hundreds of bodies lying as they had fallen. Sixteen thousand dead means at least 70,000 casualties all told, or 35,000 on a side if losses were equally distributed. This is figured on the basis of the 16,000 dead which were already buried, without allowing for the numbers of the fallen that still lie about in the woods. And yet this is a battle the name of which is, I dare venture to say, hardly more than

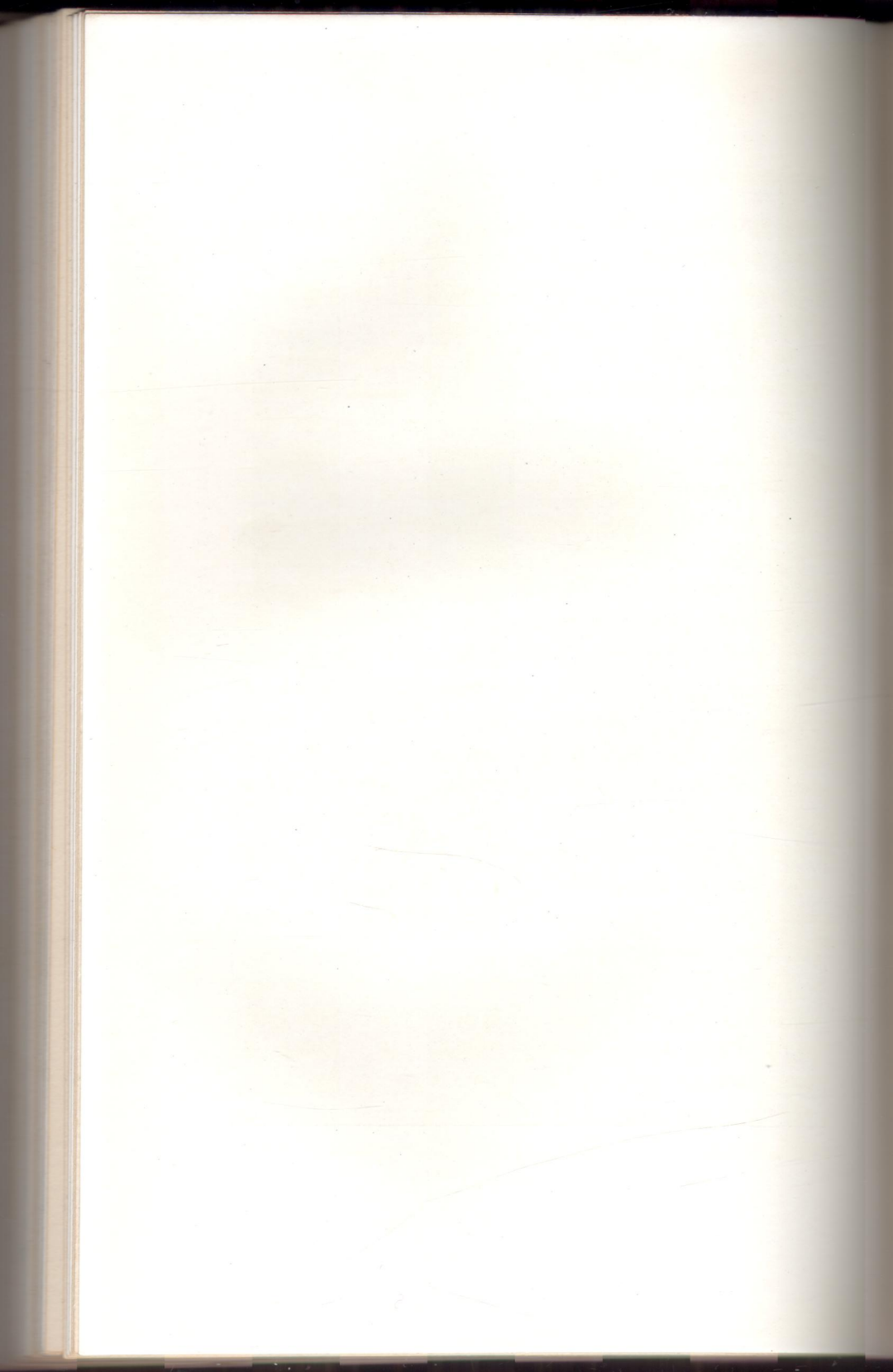
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known either in England or the United States, and in which the losses on both sides probably amount to more than the entire army that Meade commanded at the battle of Gettysburg. If one wants to get an idea of what war is under these conditions, it is only necessary to stroll back among the trees and wander about among the maze of rifle pits and trenches thrown up by the desperate soldiers as they fought their way forward or defended their retreat.

The battle is over now, and it is a day of clear sunshine in the late autumn—such a day as the Indian summers in New England bring, when the life of spring seems to be coming back. All is peace and harmony, beetles and caterpillars are crawling about and insects humming in the sunshine. At every step we stumble across the ghastly corpses of the dead, lying with glazed eyes staring into the blue, cloudless heavens above them. All is now serene and quiet, and save for the gentle murmur of the wind in the tree tops, there is not a sound to break the stillness. And in each ghastly remnant of a human being that one sees, there is the pathetic story of some human life. Here alone, unwashed and uncared for, lie the last earthly remains of men, each of whom has somewhere a wife or sweetheart, mother or sister, who would perhaps give their life to have even the poor mangled body that



Ammunition Wagon left by the Austrians after the Battle of Avgoustow.



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lies rotting in the woods. And in each dead body is disclosed the story of the fight, and the pathetic effort of the stricken man to stave off the inevitable.

And he who has the heart to walk about in this ghastly place can read the last sad moments of almost every corpse. Here one sees a blue-coated Austrian with leg shattered by a jagged bit of a shell. The trouser perhaps has been ripped open and clumsy attempts been made to dress the wound, while a great splash of red shows where the failing strength was exhausted before the flow of blood could be checked. Here, again, is a body with a ghastly rip in the chest made by bayonet or shell fragment. Frantic hands now stiffened in death are seen trying to hold together great wounds from which life must have flowed in a few great spurts of blood. Here it is no figure of speech about the ground being soaked with gore. One can see it—coagulated like bits of raw liver; sand and earth in great lumps are held together by this human cement.

Other bodies lie in absolute peace and serenity, struck dead with a rifle bullet through the heart or some other instantly vital spot. These lie like men asleep, and on their faces is the peace of absolute rest and relaxation; but they are few compared to those upon whose pallid, blood-

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stained faces one reads the last frantic agony of death. And what I have written here of the dead is only a little of what one could write, for of the more horrible sights of the battlefield it is impossible to write, and indeed very unpleasant to think of at all if one can keep them out of one's mind after having seen them.

I have mentioned this battle of Ivangrod merely as a type to illustrate the manner of work that the Russians are doing in these days, and to make clear the determination with which they are waging this war. In the terrible chaos which now involves all Europe it is doubtful if the world at large (other than the countries engaged) will ever realize the magnitude and severity of these operations. Even as I write now of the scene of carnage and blood in the woods about Kozienice, there is in the making, about Cracow, a battle of so much greater importance and on so much vaster a scale, that perhaps when these lines are read, the action I have spoken of will be utterly lost in its comparative insignificance. Personally I have long since abandoned any idea of trying to work out the details of the battles that are going on. A single one of these covers such an area and contains so many details, that even to begin a study of a field demands a vast amount of time. Before one action is fairly ended, a far greater one is already under way; and all that a correspondent



A Russian Grave near Avgoustow.



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can hope to do in this war is to keep pace with the results from day to day, sending as carefully as may be the significant events of what is going on, and not attempting to work out the details at all. Such a story as this must be taken merely as a typical cross-section of a battle, and in no way an attempt at an accurate historical study of the military movement itself.

The soldiers themselves go on from battlefield to battlefield, from one scene of carnage to another. They see their regiments dwindle to nothing, their officers decimated, three-fourths of their comrades dead or wounded, and yet each night they gather about their bivouacs apparently undisturbed by it all. One sees them on the road the day after one of these desperate fights, marching cheerfully along, singing songs and laughing and joking with each other. This is *moral*, and it is of the stuff that victories are made. And of such is the fibre of the Russian soldier scattered over these hundreds of miles of front to-day. He exists in millions much as I have described him above. He has abiding faith in his companions, in his officers, and in his cause. I think myself that he and his brothers are going to be extremely hard for the Germans to beat, and that sooner or later he will win. Time alone can justify this belief.

