

THE NEW PROMISE OF "TROUBLE IN THE BALKANS"

Germany's One Place in the Sun, Her Berlin to Bagdad Adventure, Is Threatened by Coming Allied Thrust Out of Salonica.

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For several days the reports coming from the Balkans and appearing in the press in various parts of the world have indicated that there is immediate promise of one more Allied offensive, this time from Salonica. Nor is it too much to say that the effect of a successful Allied drive from Salonica to the Danube would be of more considerable influence than anything else in changing the face of the world conflict.

The reason for this is perfectly patent. When Germany, with her Austrian ally, went south, crushing Serbia and Montenegro and by enlisting Bulgaria opening the road to Constantinople and beyond, she actually accomplished more from the political point of view than by all her other much less successful, if more dazzling, triumphs.

For many years Berlin and Vienna had dreamed of an expansion to and beyond the Aegean and the Hellespont. Sea power had effectively closed Teutonic hopes of expansion in the Far East and of more than limited colonial development in Africa and the Far East. As long as Britain remained supreme on the blue water the outlying colonies of Germany were bound to fall to the British in any war, as the progress of events in the present conflict has demonstrated.

The March to the Near East.

But the march to the Near East was overland. Seated at the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, Germany could command the crossing to Asia, she would be beyond the reach of naval power and her expansion could spread through Anatolia and down the Nile as well as outward toward Persia, and even India. A reorganized Turkish army, strengthened and stiffened by Teutonic contingents, could restore the Ottoman empire and threaten Britain at Suez, the "heel of the British Achilles."

And all of this dream the successful campaign of last winter, for the time at least, transformed into reality. The destruction of Serbia bound Berlin to Byzantium and the Bagdad railroad prolonged the line far down toward Mesopotamia. The train which to-day starts at Antwerp and halts only at the Stamboul quay is for the Germans a sign and symbol of that "place in the sun" they have long sought. It is the solid achievement of the war.

It is wholly conceivable that Germany might now, or after a few more months of the terrific sacrifices that are daily asked of her, consent to evacuate France and restore Belgium. She might even retire from Russian Poland and persuade her Austrian ally to make certain concessions to Italy in the Trentino. She might accept the loss of her African and Asiatic colonies, but all these would be but comparative losses if she could retain her supremacy in the Balkans and her mastery of the Turk's dominions.

Mittleuropa.

Granted all her losses, she would still have emerged from the war a gainer, and in due course of time that Mittleuropa of which we have heard so much would become a reality and the Germans would be masters in a coalition which extended from the Baltic to the Persian Gulf, which touched Egypt at Suez and menaced India from Busra. Given a few years of peace to organize her conquests, Germany would be established permanently in Western Asia, across the exit of Russia, on the flank of Britain, through her Mahometan influence a threat to the Moslem populations of France, Britain, Russia and even Italy.

Therefore it is safe to conclude that only complete defeat, a defeat far more considerable than we have yet any immediate promise of, would bring Germany to surrender what she has won between the Danube and the Aegean. For such a surrender would bolt the doorway to the East. Russia would establish herself at

the Straits, the Turkish Empire would be partitioned among Germany's enemies and the real bulk would sooner or later come to the nation which, seated at Scutari and in Armenia, would infallibly penetrate and absorb Anatolia.

A Decisive Defeat.

On the other hand, if an Allied offensive, starting at Salonica, where a huge Anglo-French-Serb army has been concentrated, could cut through the forces of the Central Powers in the Valley of the Vardar, reach the Danube by Skopje and Nish, then the German dream would be extinguished, there would be no longer any hope of profit after peace which might compensate for the past sacrifices or the future suffering that war entailed. Such a defeat would be far more effective than any retreat in Northern France or Belgium, any withdrawal in Poland and Volhynia, in bringing Germany to peace.

It is for this reason that I believe the campaign in the Balkans, to which every sign points, may easily prove far more important in its political effects than anything that will happen in Picardy or even Galicia in the present year.

Now, what is the exact military situation at the present moment in the Balkans? Nine months ago an Anglo-French army which had come too late to save Serbia fell back sullenly from Macedonia into Greece, took its stand before Salonica and across the neck of the Chalcidice Peninsula under conditions strikingly recalling the recoil of Wellington behind the lines of Torres Vedras in the Napoleonic Wars. The mass of the Serb army, fleeing over the Albanian Alps, reached the coast at St. Jean de Medua and at Durazzo, took ship for Corfu and came to temporary rest on this island, reduced to abject misery and for long out of the war.

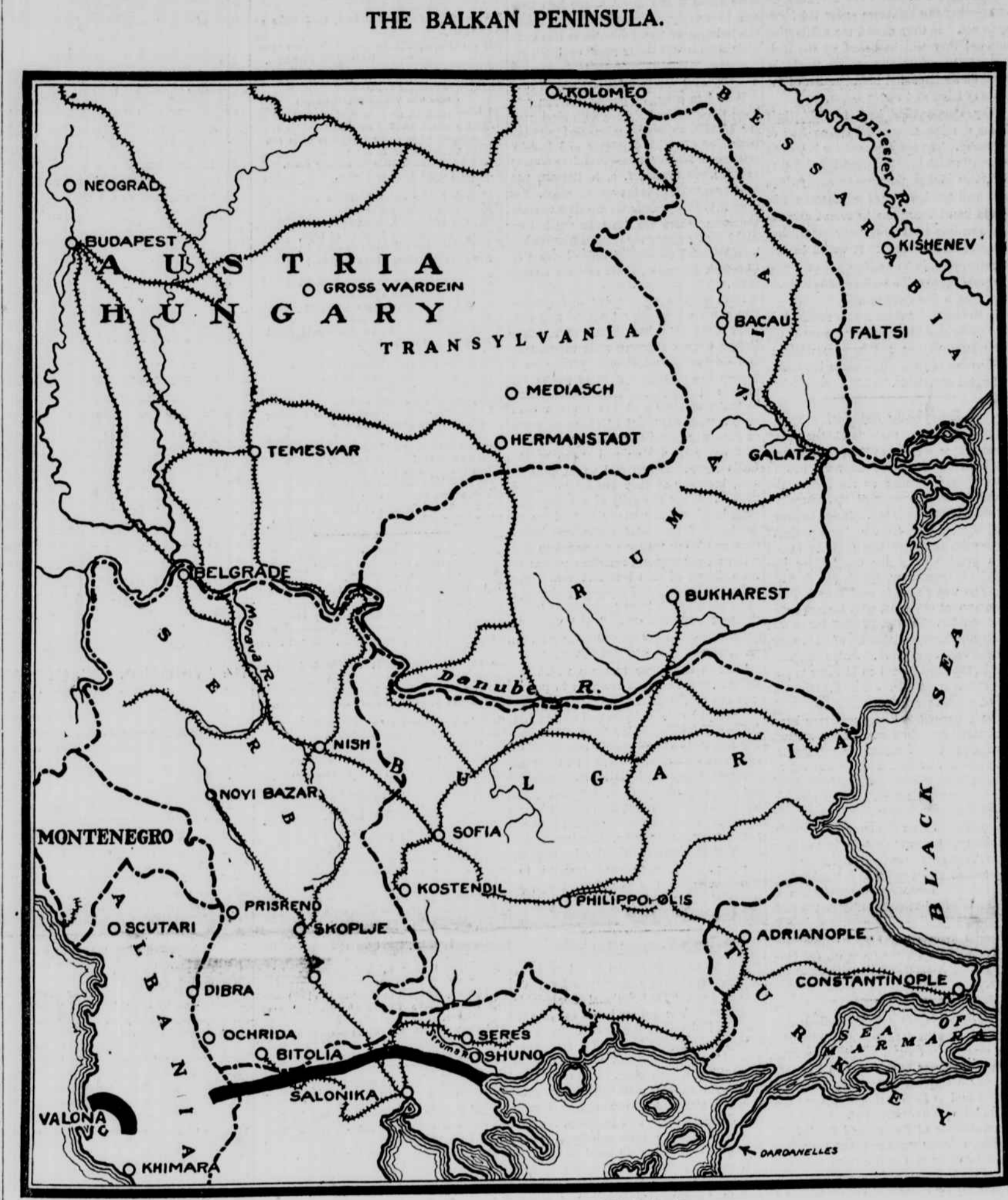
Joffre Overruled Kitchener.

There was a time when it seemed likely that German, Austrian and Bulgarian troops would pass the Greek frontier and attempt to repeat the exploit of Sult at Corunna, when he forced the army of Sir John Moore to take ship. But this did not happen. The Central Powers paused at the Greek frontier. Austrian troops entered Albania and approached Valona, but an Italian army here stood safely under conditions recalling the army at Salonica.

From that hour to the present there has been a slow but steady rise in the strength of the Allied forces at Salonica. Kitchener, who opposed the transfer of British troops to Salonica, was overruled by Joffre in a memorable interview, when the French commander visited Britain. There was a further interview between Kitchener and Briand, which is a basis for legend already. But the upshot of the matter was that the French decided that Salonica should be held and that there should be a promise, at the least, of a future deliverance of Serbia.

Thereafter Sarraill, who defended Verdun in the opening campaign, but was removed by Joffre because of differences of opinion, was sent to the Near East with a strong French army. Many of the British troops withdrawn from Gallipoli passed to the mainland. In a few months there were not less than a quarter of a million French and British troops in this region, and backed by a strong fleet they had transformed the easily defensible position into a practically impregnable stronghold, another Torres Vedras. By spring a restored and equipped Serbian army was brought over from Corfu, and at the present hour the Allies have an army that is rarely estimated at less than a half million and has recently been declared on interesting authority to exceed 650,000.

All question of an attack upon Salonica was over with the winter. In due course we were informed that the French and British troops were beginning to push out from the sea coast and were approaching the old Serb frontier. Only the other day there was official report of Serbian ad-



The Heavily Shaded Line Shows the Allied Position.

vances along Lake Presba, which is close to the Albanian line and only a short distance from Monastir, the chief city of Macedonia. Such a force would be in touch with the Italians pushing out from Valona.

The Allies at Salonica.

We may, then, assume that something over half a million Allied troops are now occupying a line but little south of the former Serb-Greek frontier, while an Italian army of little less than 100,000 is covering its western flank at Valona. The Allied troops are based upon two railroads, or rather three, the Salonica-Monastir railroad, passing through Vodena, which crosses the firing line just south of Monastir; the main Belgrade-Salonica line, which goes up the Vardar Valley, and the Salonica-Adrianople line, which parallels the Belgrade line for some miles and then turns east, south of the Greek frontier, and follows the Aegean shore to Bulgarian territory.

Facing them the Allies have practically the whole Bulgarian army, but allowance being made for losses in the three recent wars this cannot number more than 200,000, for Bulgaria is compelled to keep rear guard troops in Macedonia and Old Serbia, and she is also obliged to maintain forces to watch Rumania, whose intentions are never certain. As far as the Black Sea coast is concerned Bulgaria seems to be relying upon Turkish troops, stationed at Varna and Burgas, to prevent an attack by a Russian army conveyed by the Black Sea fleet.

In addition there has been a considerable Teutonic force to the northeast of Salonica, covering the Struma Valley, the direct route to Sofia, up which the present Greek King led his victorious army in the Second Balkan War, and covering also the railroad from Salonica to Adrianople, where it enters Bulgar territory. This railroad is the sole supply line for that army, aside from the bad road up through

the Struma Pass and over the crest into Kustendil, where a branch line from Sofia terminates.

The Bulgarian armies in Macedonia are dependent upon the main Belgrade-Salonica line for supplies and upon the Nish-Sofia-Adrianople line for communication by rail with Bulgaria. There is a good road over the mountains from Skopje, by Kumanovo to Kustendil, but no railroad. The Bulgarians in Monastir depend entirely upon highways, the best coming from Veles, where it leaves the Vardar Valley, and the Belgrade Railroad by Prilip to the Monastir Plain. Such Austrian forces as may be facing the Italians in Albania have only wretched trails leading back by Ochrida to Monastir, by Dibra and Prisrend to the Skopje-Prilip Bazar Railroad and by such service as can be maintained by the sea.

Obviously when the Allies do strike their blow will be threefold. Their main thrust will be up the Vardar Valley toward Skopje, and thence to Nish, following the Belgrade-Salonica railroad. If they can reach Nish they will cut the railroad which binds Berlin and Vienna to Constantinople and, save for Danube River steamers, isolate Bulgaria and Turkey from their allies.

There is also certain to be a joint operation by the Serbs, who are already active before Monastir, and the Italians, who hold Valona. The former will undertake to clean the Bulgarians and Austrians out of the Monastir Plain, taking the city of Monastir. The latter will endeavor to clear Albania and reach the old Montenegrin frontier, with the city of Scutari as their objective.

Finally, there is bound to be some effort made to move east and drive the Austro-German troops out of the lower reaches of the Struma Valley and eastward along the Salonica-Adrianople railroad, but this last will hardly be of more

than minor importance, unless the Allies shall undertake to follow the route of the Greek King up the Struma Valley, toward Sofia, which is unlikely, in view of the extreme difficulty of transport in this region and the strength for the defensive supplied by the mountain positions.

Delay Helps Allies.

Why have the Allies so far postponed their thrust? The answer must be found in political as well as military considerations. The attacks upon Austria and Germany by Russia on the east and by Britain and France on the west have already compelled the Central Powers to withdraw a considerable portion of their troops from the Balkans. In fact, the withdrawals began at the time the German blow at Verdun was being prepared. This leaves more and more of the burden of defending Macedonia to the Bulgarians, and it gives the Salonica army of the Allies an increasing advantage in numbers. There are evidences, too, that Italy, already on the offensive along the Trentino front, is about to attack at the Isonzo. This might compel the Austrians to recall their last battalions from the Balkans, as they have already called home most of their troops in Albania.

[NOTE: This article was written just before news of the Italian success on the Isonzo was received.]

In such a situation Bulgaria would either have to face a combat wholly unequal or else change sides. No one will predict that the latter will happen, but no one will believe that it is impossible. The war has not gone as the Bulgarians expected, and, despite the easy conquest of Macedonia, Bulgaria has since had to bear the great costs of a protracted war, the end of which does not appear in view. She undertook to help destroy Serbia, but will she remain to fight Britain and France as well? This is the political riddle.

The military considerations are simpler. The longer the Allies wait at Salonica,

while the pressure against the Central Powers on all the other fronts is growing, the fewer German and Austrian troops will remain to bar their way to the Danube and the more certain they will be of a decisive success. This, I think, is the main factor. We shall hear many rumors of Bulgarian surrender. They may prove accurate, but I do not believe Allied strategy is chiefly based on the notion that Bulgaria, having sold out to Berlin, can be bought back by London and Paris in advance of a real military disaster in the field.

But unquestionably such a disaster would bring the collapse of Bulgaria. The war is unpopular, although all Bulgaria desires to have and to hold Macedonia and see Serbia reduced to nothing. There is the bitter memory of the fiasco of the Second Balkan War, and there is a strong Russophile party, which has no immediate power but is by no means inactive. If Bulgaria, by gold or by defeat, should be brought to change sides, then the whole complexion of affairs in the Balkans would be changed, and there would be a permanent and complete severance of communications between the Central Powers and Turkey, with the cessation of the flow of the munitions necessary to maintain Turkish military forces and the subventions which keep Turkish finance going.

It is safe to conclude that some time in the next two or three months, at least before the Balkan winter approaches, we shall see a great thrust out from Salonica. If it succeeds then there will be the biggest change in Bethmann-Hollweg's war map that can be conceived of, and there will be the complete extinction of the chief hope that German statesmen and publicists cling to, of a greater Germany after the war and a future for German economic and colonial expansion beyond the frontiers of the German Empire of 1914.

If the thrust fails, then the situation

Decision of the Whole War May Come from Victory in the Balkans.

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will be left as it is, and the outlook for the future will depend on the progress or lack of progress that has been made in the Eastern and Western and Italian fields. But the longer the attack is delayed, while the other offensives are calling back the German and Austrian troops in the Balkans, the surer the Allies will be of success and the less will be the Bulgarian enthusiasm for remaining with her present partners.

What the Allies Can Offer.

Remember always, too, that the Allies can offer Bulgaria the Thracian districts, including Adrianople and the country north of the Enos-Midia line, which were lost to Turkey in the Second Balkan War, after they had been acquired in the first. They can also, with the consent of Serbia, leave Bulgaria that portion of Macedonia east of the Vardar, which Serbia was willing to cede a year ago. But only with Serbian consent could this be done, and there is very great reluctance now to ask Serbia to make any further sacrifice since the mistakes of Allied diplomacy brought about her present agony.

Allied delay may also be conditioned on the fact that a Greek election is at hand, and a victory by Venizelos would put Greece in the hands of the friends of the Allies and insure a real neutrality, if not an active support, from the Hellenic government. Already the Greek army has been demobilized and the old dangers from German intrigue in Athens and ascendancy in the mind of King Constantine are at an end. It is by no means certain that the election will not be followed by a revolution whether Venizelos wins or is defeated by German influence and royal interference, and the Allies would be in a better posture to deal with the Greek problem if they were not already committed to a Macedonian campaign.

Sooner or later, by early autumn at the latest, however, this Balkan push is to come. It may easily turn out the most important of the various Allied operations. Its relation to all the others is perfectly clear, and the fact that it is contemplated indicates the manner in which Allied military direction has now been coordinated and the movements on all fronts harmonized.

The Road to Nish.

But it is essential to emphasize the difficulties of the Balkan campaign. The Vardar Valley is in many places little more than a canyon, the Germans have had many months to construct defensive positions for their allies and the country is so restricted that the advantage of numbers, which the opponents of Bulgaria plainly possess, will be considerably if not decisively offset. Again the real test will come in the matter of artillery.

The road to Skopje and Nish is, then, long and hard. Until the Allies reach Nish their campaign will have no decisive value, although a successful ejection of the Bulgars from Macedonia may, by depriving them of their profit in the German alliance, cool their loyalty to their partners and open the way for a change of alignment. All in all, the Balkan campaign may prove the most interesting and the most important of the present summer and autumn. It is worth close watching, and it reveals the rapidly mounting curve of Allied resources and the patent weakening of the strength of the Central Powers, since they have been compelled so greatly to reduce their effectiveness on this highly important front.

Allied victory here will have a tremendous effect in Bucharest and in Constantinople, but these are things that may well wait upon the progress of the campaign itself. What should be realized is that the British and French drive at the Somme, even the Russian offensive in Galicia and Volhynia, are only component parts of one comprehensive scheme, which also includes an Italian attack on the Isonzo and a thrust up from Salonica. This combined and concentric attack on several fronts simultaneously is nothing more nor less than Grant's strategy of 1864, and once more there is great light to be found by a study of the Civil War campaigns of the closing year.