

The First and Second Battles of the Marne

A COMPARISON

BY MAJOR-GENERAL SIR FREDERICK MAURICE



It is one of the great coincidences of history that twice in the same war the Germans should, at the culmination of an offensive campaign which had given them a succession of victories, have made the same mistake on the same ground, and that they should have been twice defeated by the same methods. In the absence of detailed information from the German side, it is at present only possible to deduce the plans of the Great German Headquarters from evidence which is necessarily incomplete, and it is beyond the scope of a magazine article to go into detail in the evidence which has led me to the conclusions I have formed as to these plans. I must, therefore, ask my readers to take what I have to say as to the intentions of the enemy, both in 1914 and in 1918, on trust, and I would refer those who desire to learn more of the German plans in 1914 to a study which I have just completed in book form and which will be published very shortly.

On September 4, 1914, von Kluck crossed the Marne at and to the west of Château-Thierry, with the bulk of the First German Army, which formed the right wing of the host that had swept through Belgium and invaded France. This was, I believe, intended by Moltke, the chief of the German General Staff, to be the opening move of the decisive battle which should complete the defeat of the Allies in the West. The great scheme of envelopment, in the execution of which von Kluck's army was to have been the chief instrument, had failed, thanks to the delay caused by the resistance of the little British army, and von Kluck, though he marched hard and fast from the Somme to the Marne, was not in time to intercept the French

Fifth Army, which had retired on the British right. The situation as it presented itself to von Moltke in the first days of September was somewhat this: the British army which had at first formed the extreme left of the Allied line had been heavily defeated; its advanced base at Amiens had been occupied and direct communication with its bases on the Channel coast had been cut. Its casualties were reported to be severe; the prisoners taken were in a state of exhaustion, and it had retreated rapidly on Paris, with the loss of a number of guns and much material, which, as its line of communications had gone, could not be replaced. It was believed to have lost all power of offense. On the left of the British army, Joffre had attempted to assemble French forces to prevent the threatened envelopment. These, too, had been defeated by von Kluck and had been found to consist mainly of Territorial and Reserve troops, who were thought to have no great fighting value. They had retired on Paris, and it was held that they would be rendered innocuous by a comparatively small German detachment. On the remainder of the front, Joffre's offensive into Lorraine had been defeated, and the French armies which had crossed the frontier with such high hopes had been driven back into their own country. Verdun held firm, but west of it the Allies were everywhere in retreat. The time had come for the *Entscheidung*, the decisive blow, and for the *Entscheidung* Moltke evolved a *Kaiserplan*. (See sketch Map.)

On the eastern front of the long battle-line the German Crown Prince was established north, east, and west of the defenses of Verdun, and only the southern approaches to the fortress remained open to the French. The French center, to the south of Châlons, was sagging badly and appeared to be still giving

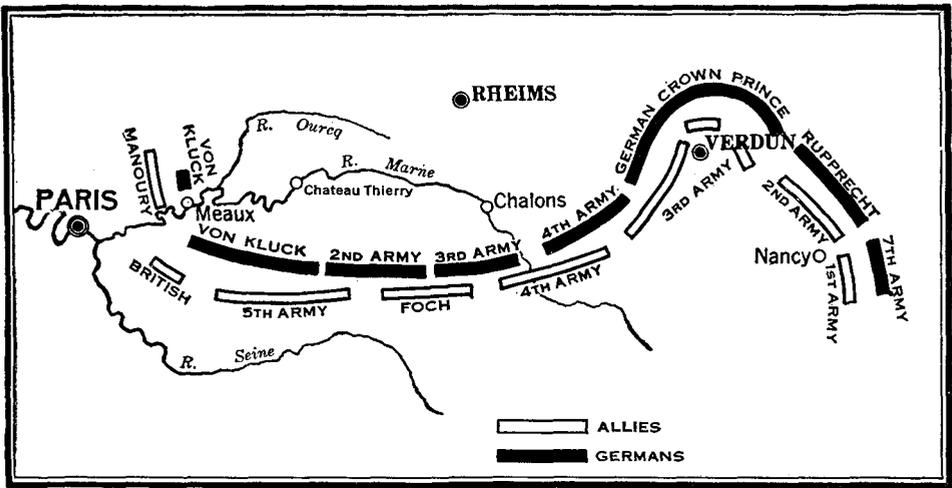
way before the German pressure. On the other hand, the French forces on the extreme left of the Allied line, and the British army were too close to the defenses of Paris to make envelopment any longer possible. So Moltke, instead, determined to turn to his advantage the situation about Verdun and the assumed weakness of the French center. Rupprecht, with his own army and the Seventh German Army, was to drive in at Nancy, while the Crown Prince's right and the Fourth German Army attacked the French to the southwest of Verdun. The horns of this attack, the German Fourth and Seventh Armies, advancing, respectively, east and west, were to unite and lock up the greater part of the French right at Verdun, where in due course it would be forced to capitulate.

While this attack was in progress in the east, the Second and Third German Armies were to unite in a great assault on the French center, to the south and southwest of Châlons, and, having broken through, they were to wheel to the left, pivoting on von Kluck, and with the latter's help herd the Allied center and left into Paris. It is probable that the Germans counted upon being able to bring down their forces which were besieging Maubeuge, and Landwehr and other Reserve formations from Belgium and Germany, in time to complete the investment of the French capital on the north and west. In any event, it is certain that the arrangements for the investment were so far completed that the Château of Chantilly, formerly the palace of the Duc d'Aumale, was selected as the Kaiser's headquarters until Paris had capitulated and he could lead his troops through the Arc de Triomphe. A guard was actually set upon the château to preserve it, for the imperial use, from the fate which had befallen other no less historic buildings at the hands of the German soldiers, and to this is due the fact that its treasures have been preserved. In this scheme von Kluck's rôle was to hold the French Fifth Army in its place, and the British army, too, if it had not decided to abandon its allies and retire immediately to the Atlantic coast.

This plan was a second and revised

edition of the original plan of envelopment which envisaged a gigantic Sedan by means of a converging movement by the two wings. It aimed at nothing less than the first—namely, the complete annihilation of the Allied forces in the west. Fortunately, it was based on a totally false conception of the military situation, for the Allies were far from being, as the German headquarters conceived, a beaten foe who had lost all power of offense.

Joffre had been completely surprised at Charleroi and Mons. Neither he nor any other Allied general had conceived it possible that the Germans would be able to bring so much of their total strength to the west, and would dare to leave so little to face the hosts of Russia. He had not, therefore, believed that the enemy would have had sufficient force to invade Belgium north of the Meuse and come down on his left in overwhelming force. The enemy did all these things, and reaped great advantages from the surprise which they effected. They completely upset Joffre's plans for offense; they conquered Belgium, overran northern France, and established themselves in positions from which until lately all the efforts of the Allies failed to dislodge them; but they had not, as they supposed, inflicted such defeats upon their enemy as left him in a position of complete military inferiority. Once the enemy's plan was disclosed, Joffre proceeded to disengage his left from the danger which threatened it and swung his whole line back, pivoting upon Verdun, with the object, which he kept firmly before him, of resuming the offensive at the first possible moment. To use a favorite phrase of the enemy's, the retreat "was according to plan." As is always the case when an army retreats before an energetic enemy, the losses of the Allies were very heavy and the constant marching to the rear had a most depressing effect upon their troops. But Joffre, with the whole burden of the defense of civilization upon his shoulders, never lost his grip upon the situation. He began at once to transfer troops from his extreme right, where his offensive had failed, to his extreme left, in order to check the enemy's enveloping movement, and, if possible, envelop it in



THE FIRST BATTLE OF THE MARNE
Position of the opposing armies on September 5, 1914

his turn. He therefore quite early in the retreat began to assemble near Amiens a new Sixth Army under Manoury. Before the concentration of this army had progressed very far it was forced to fall back before von Kluck upon Paris. But von Kluck, doubtless acting upon instructions from his Great Headquarters, attached no particular importance to this maneuver of Joffre's, and, leaving only one Reserve corps to watch Manoury, marched to the Marne.

Prussian conceit and self-confidence proved the undoing of Germany, and von Moltke, blindly confident, played straight into Joffre's hands. The extent and rapidity of their early successes warped the judgment of the German leaders, whose official reports were filled with whoops of victory. Convinced that nothing could stand against the weight of the mailed fist, they dropped all caution, and on September 4th von Kluck was fast in the trap Joffre had prepared for him. The French commander-in-chief had, with wonderful prescience, divined the enemy's intention. To the very place where the German blow intended to break his center was delivered he had brought up a new Ninth Army, which he had formed under the command of Foch, and train-load after train-load of troops from the eastern front had poured into Paris to complete Manoury's army. On September 5th,

when von Kluck, advancing a day's march south of the Marne, had put his head still farther into the noose, Joffre was ready to strike, and Manoury advanced his army against the corps which von Kluck had left opposite him on the left bank of the Ourcq.

On the evening of September 5th von Kluck suddenly became aware that the French force which he had believed to be only fit to man the defenses of Paris was menacing his line of retreat and constituted a danger which must be removed at any cost. He accordingly at once sent back to the Ourcq, to overwhelm Manoury, two of his corps which were south of the Marne and opposite the British, to face whom he left a strong force of cavalry under von Marwitz. For the next three days much depended upon the action of the British army. The attack on the French center went on as planned, and Foch, fighting a glorious defensive battle, was pressed slowly back. Manoury to the west of the Ourcq was more and more hard pressed as von Kluck developed his strength against him. If the British could be held off till Manoury could be defeated, the German plan might be carried through without essential change. But the British army was not, as the Germans believed it to be, a routed and disorganized force. Though the full weight of the German envelopment had fallen

upon it in its exposed position on the extreme left of the Allied line, it had been disengaged from the grip of overwhelming numbers by dogged fighting and skilful leadership. It was wearied by long marches, and puzzled at the continual retreating before an enemy who had not defeated it in battle, but its fighting spirit was unbroken and it hailed the order to march northward on September 6th with a joyful shout. Von Marwitz's cavalry proved quite incapable of preventing its advance, and was driven from successive positions. Early on September 9th, when von Kluck was fighting a desperate but still indecisive battle against Manoury, it crossed the Marne to the west of Château-Thierry, and, by threatening the line of retreat of the First German Army, caused von Kluck to throw up the sponge and issue orders for a withdrawal. On the evening of the same day, Foch made his immortal counter-attack, in the marshes of St.-Gond, and turned what without it would have been a check to the German plans, into a complete defeat that made the final victory of Germany in the west forever impossible. The outstanding features of the first battle of the Marne are the overweening confidence of the Germans in their own power, their grossly mistaken estimate of the Allied strength, and, as the result of these two, their neglect to secure their exposed flank. We shall find these mistakes exactly repeated in the second battle of the Marne.

Between the late autumn of 1917 and the spring of 1918 the Germans, thanks to the collapse of Russia, were able to transfer over 1,000,000 men, a great mass of artillery, and many aeroplanes from the eastern to the western front, and with the help of this huge reinforcement they planned the second Kaiser campaign in the west which should give them complete victory. The German offensive of 1918 consisted of five episodes. It began in March, with the great attack upon the British right, which was intended to separate the French and British armies. This attack was stayed at the very gates of Amiens, mainly because the Allies in the moment of peril were compelled to face realities

and established an effective unity of command which placed Foch in supreme control. How near the Germans were to taking Amiens, and to effecting their object of dividing the Allied forces, they, fortunately for us, failed to realize. They were led aside to follow up an unexpected success in Flanders, which produced the second episode of the campaign, an attack again directed against the British army and again checked with French help. After a month's interval, the third episode opened with the Crown Prince's surprise attack on the Chemin des Dames, which overwhelmed the Franco-American forces on the spot, and brought the Germans to the Marne at Château-Thierry, where they were within little more than forty miles of Paris. The fourth episode opened in the second week of June, and consisted in an attempt to extend this last success by an attack directed on Compiègne, which ended in comparative failure.

The position at the end of June was that the Germans had established a front as shown in the second map. They had created three great salients in the Allied line—the first in Flanders, with its head at Hazebrouck; the second astride the Somme, with its head at Montdidier; the third between Soissons and Rheims, with its head at Château-Thierry on the Marne. The remaining salient shown, that of St.-Mihiel south of Verdun, which was wiped out by General Pershing's first offensive, was a relic of the campaign of the 1914 and played no part in Germany's offensive projects for this year. The position which Germany had gained by the middle of the summer was then a commanding one. The enemy was established within forty miles of Calais and Boulogne, the direct railway communication to Paris through Amiens to those ports was under the fire of German guns, and the British army stood "with its back to the wall," while the German advance to the Marne had severed direct communication between Paris and Verdun and gravely threatened the French capital. To the Germans, it appeared that the time had come for the decisive blow. As in 1914, they were carried away by the extent of their successes and believed themselves to be irresistible. The Kai-

ser, in dismissing the Reichstag in the summer, had announced to its members that when he met them in the autumn it would be to celebrate a German triumph. All military critics in Germany announced, with a unanimity which looks very much as though it was due to inspiration, that Foch's reserves were exhausted. It was declared to be impossible for the American forces to intervene in time in the decisive struggle, and the announcements made in the United States of the number of troops transported to France were treated as bluff. So Ludendorff prepared for the final attack, which he called the *Friedensturm*, the assault which would bring peace.

The plan for the *Friedensturm* was on a scale comparable with the great plan of attack in 1914 which I have already described. The armies of von Einem and a great part of von Mudra's were to attack in Champagne east of Rheims, and come down upon Epernay and Châlons. Von Boehn's army was to cross the Marne at and to the east of Château-Thierry, and the two attacks, converging from the north and west, in the same way as did Pershing's attack on the St.-Mihiel salient, were to pinch out Rheims and the mountain of Rheims. This is as much as was attempted, but it appears certain that Ludendorff had much more in view. On the western face of the Marne salient, between Soissons and Château-Thierry, a new army was to be formed under the command of von Carlowitz, who had been brought across from the eastern front; and it appears to have been the intention that, when von Boehn had extended the western face of the salient south across the Marne, and the railways passing through Rheims had been secured, the direction of the attack should be changed from south to west and that von Boehn and von Carlowitz should advance against Paris astride the Marne. Nor was this all. There is clear evidence that the armies of von Hutier and von Marwitz in the Montdidier salient were preparing for attack, and it seems that Ludendorff proposed to launch them upon Paris from the north at the time when, as he hoped, Foch would be rushing his reserves to the Marne to defend

the French capital from the east. If my diagnosis of the enemy's intentions is correct, this was a great plan worthy to wind up a Kaiser campaign, if only it had been based on a true appreciation of the Allied power.

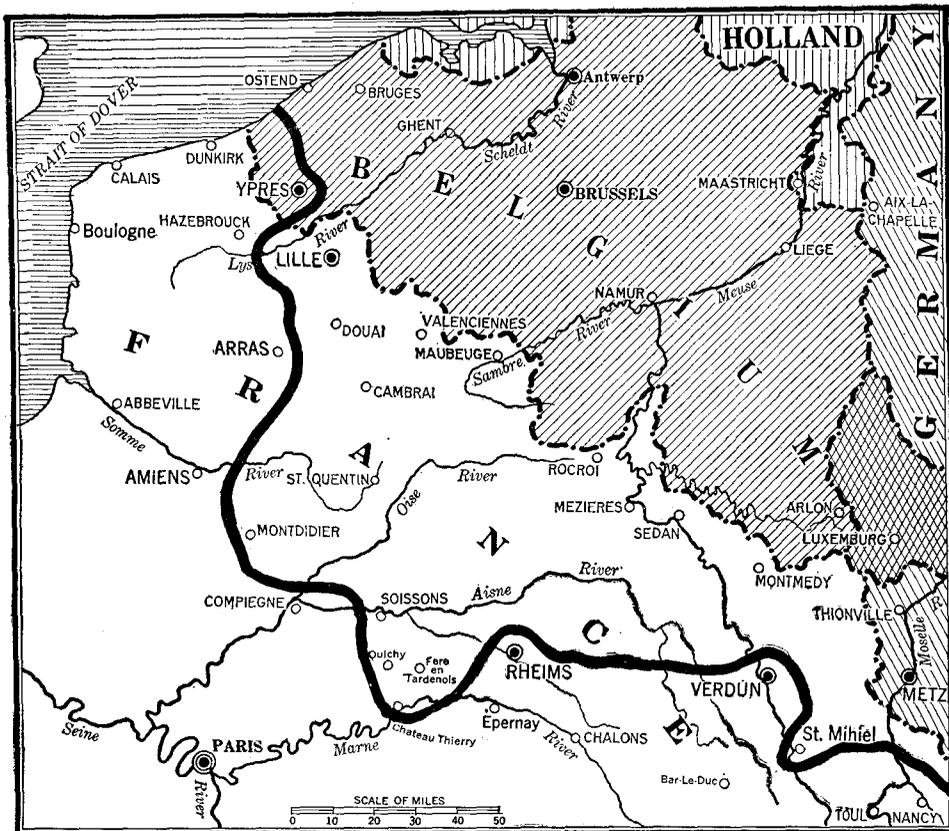
In fact, the enemy was far from being as strong as he had been, and the Allies had increased materially in strength since the evil days of the spring. Each of the episodes which preceded the great German attack of July 15th had caused a drain upon the German reserves, which Ludendorff was unable to make good. So when he was ready for what was to have been his last assault he had no longer at his disposal the forces which he had in the previous month. Furthermore, the long and bloody struggle on the western front had materially altered the character of the German army. Ludendorff, realizing this, and thinking only of attack, had drawn from the front the best of his men and trained them carefully behind the line to lead the assaults. These storm troops, who prepared the way for the less highly trained mass behind, proved very effective in the early battles of the year, but, being continually in the forefront of the battle, they suffered very heavy losses, and it became more and more difficult to replace them. It was, I believe, chiefly the necessity for selecting and training more storm troops which led to the long pauses between the battles that gave Foch his chance. With wonderful prevision and strength of character, Foch applied during the trying spring and summer the doctrine of economy of force which he had preached to the French army before the war. With sparing hand he doled out to Petain and to Haig a bare minimum of his reserves which would suffice to keep the enemy in check. Like Joffre in 1914, as soon as one reserve was sent into battle, he set about constituting another, and was ever on the watch for the opportunity of a counter-offensive. The time which the enemy allowed him, and the steady flow of American troops into France enabled him, contrary to the enemy's expectations, to keep his reserve in being. So when, on July 15th, the Crown Prince opened the *Friedensturm* on either side of Rheims, Foch's reserves were not ex-

hausted, and the American forces, ready for battle, were in sufficient strength to constitute a very important factor in the great struggle which turned the tide of war in the west.

The Germans appear to have been so confident of success that they neglected to take the precautions which had led in great measure to their earlier victories. Their successes in March and at the end of May were due chiefly to surprise, but their preparations for the battle of July 15th were so obvious that Foch was perfectly informed as to their intentions; while, though the security of their right was to them a vital matter, they do not seem to have taken any special care to intrench the front between Soissons and Château-Thierry, and the organization of von Carlowitz's army in this sector was still incomplete when the Crown Prince opened the battle. Gouraud's admirable defensive tactics shattered the attack to the east of Rheims. As soon as the German bombardment opened, the French guns in great numbers, and fully prepared, began to reply and disorganized the German concentrations. The main defensive positions had been covered by a zone of outposts of much greater depth than the enemy expected. These outposts fell back before the enemy's attack, which was, to a great extent, a blow in the air. So the German storm troops arrived before the main defensive positions in considerable disorder. At only two points, of no special importance, did the enemy gain any success, while his picked divisions suffered the heaviest loss. This magnificent defense made the failure of the German plans certain on the very first day of the battle, for, with one of the two converging attacks defeated, the plan for the advance on Paris could not be carried through; but more was necessary before Foch could strike back. Von Boehn, on the southern face of the salient, had succeeded in crossing the Marne, and between the Marne and Rheims the enemy made progress which, if it had been allowed to continue, might have forced Foch to abandon the city. The situation, though greatly improved by Gouraud's success, was still not without danger and the southern battle-front had to

be steadied. It was then that the American divisions of General Degoutte's army gave the enemy a taste of their real quality. Their counter-attack on the second day of the battle south of the Marne not only imperiled the position of the Germans who had thrust forward on the southern bank of the river, but gave just that fillip to the Allied defense which turned the scale in a doubtful struggle. Unlike Ludendorff, Foch was prudent as well as daring. If he had made his counter-attack while von Boehn was still advancing south of the Marne, and his counter-attack had not met with success, the position might have been desperate. But with all immediate anxiety as to the situation east and south of Rheims removed, he was free to seize the opportunity for which he had waited so patiently. Mangin's preparations for the counter-stroke had been made in the most complete secrecy, and were screened from the enemy's observation by the forests of Villers-Cotterets. A very short bombardment gave the enemy no inkling of what was coming, and a fleet of tanks took the place of shells in opening the road for the infantry advance. Von Carlowitz's army was quite unprepared, and in one bound forward Mangin, driving straight at Soissons, throttled the communications passing through that town which fed the mass of troops assembled in the Marne salient.

This great stroke settled the fate of the *Friedensturm*, and opened a new page in the war in the west. From the time when the trench barrier was established between the Channel and Switzerland, no one had ventured to assault modern defenses without long preparation. Foch's blow was in great measure improvised, and, like the great counter-strokes of history, it seized an opportunity which presented itself in the course of the battle. But it was not only, nor, indeed, chiefly, in the conception and execution of the counter-attack that Foch showed himself to be a master of war. The enemy was given no time to recover from the difficulties in which his conceit and lack of precaution had landed him. The counter-offensive, once begun, was continued till defeat was turned to disaster, and this without any



THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE
Front line, July 14, 1918

material superiority of force. Mangin, who had no great weight of numbers, could not at once continue his attacks, and the enemy, left to himself, would have been able to withdraw behind the Marne and reconstitute a battle-front which would still have been a menace to Rheims and even to Paris. But Foch, having gained an initial advantage, was determined to press it to the very limit of his resources, and while Mangin was taking a breather, Degoutte struck in at Château-Thierry. The fresh vigor of the American forces carried all before them and turned the line of the Marne. Striking northeastward toward Fère-en-Tardenois, they forced the enemy back to the line of the Ourcq. I have very little doubt in my own mind that the enemy meant to stand at Ourchy le Château and Fère-en-Tardenois behind the upper Ourcq, but the choice no longer rested with him. No sooner was the enemy

across the river than Mangin, who had been reinforced by Foch with French and British troops, struck in again to the south of Soissons and turned the line of the Ourcq. Simultaneously, Allied pressure to the south of Rheims gradually drove in the western face of the salient, while the American attacks on the southern front were continued with the greatest energy. The enemy, assaulted on all sides of the ever-narrowing salient, had no choice but to come out of it altogether and retire behind the Aisne and the Vesle.

The second battle of the Marne defeated the second German scheme of conquest in the west and secured Paris from all danger. But the enemy still had reserves in hand and the initiative had not been completely recovered by the Allies. The sequel of the battle is, therefore, even more wonderful than the battle itself. No sooner was the enemy established on his shortened front be-

tween Soissons and Rheims, than Haig on August 8th struck his surprise blow south of the Somme. This completed the enemy's discomfiture, placed him definitely on the defensive, and forced him to undertake a shortening of his front which affected the whole battle-line from Rheims to Ypres.

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe how the enemy's retreat was anticipated by methods very similar to those which had been so successful in the second battle of the Marne, and how he was hustled back, long before he intended, beyond the Hindenburg line. The outstanding feature of Foch's generalship is that he has kept the battle going continuously for two months on an ever-widening front, which embraced eventually the whole one hundred and fifty miles from Flanders to Champagne. Before Foch made his counter-stroke both Allied and German generals had, after months of preparation, and by employing a great superiority of force upon a comparatively narrow battle-front, sustained an offensive for long periods, but no commander before Foch, in this war, has succeeded on the west-

ern front in waging battle with continuous and ever-growing success without greatly superior numbers and without long preparation. It is well known that before the second battle of the Marne the German forces on the western front were superior to those of the French and British. It is also well known that, although the number of American troops in France was large, those whose training for battle was completed were not, prior to General Pershing's victory at St.-Mihiel, very numerous. The measure of Foch's genius is shown by the fact that he has inflicted a crushing defeat upon the enemy without any great preponderance of force. The enemy's swift progress in March and in May was possible because he had great weight behind his blows; the Allied progress was more deliberate because that weight was lacking. Now that the ultimate defeat of Germany has come, we know that in Marshal Foch the Allies have had a leader of the first rank. The Hindenburg-Ludendorff combination has proved to be no better than that of any other German commanders who have tried their hands in the west and failed.

CANA

BY VIRGINIA WATSON

"THE wine of youth is spent," they said, and flung
The purple dregs where the white poppies lay,
"Ere half the hours of Life's fair feast have rung;
How can we so the others' thirst betray?"

Down the long board I watched the wistful eyes
Of all my veiled guests, the future years.
In shame I spake, "Naught in my cellar lies,
No sun-warmed joys, no effervescent tears.

"With water their expectant cups let fill,
They must content them with insipidness;
For them no bubbling hope, no heady thrill,
And sober all their days must be their dress."

But as they filled the ewers One there came
Who the gray surface touched with hand divine,
And lo! a miracle—a sudden flame
Swept through the water, changing it to wine.