

[*Berliner Tageblatt* (Anglophile Radical Liberal Daily), December 15, 1920]

THE TIDE TURNS

BY KARL ROSNER

[Karl Rosner, a German poet, served during the war as correspondent of the Kaiser's favorite newspaper, the Berlin *Lokal Anzeiger*, at the Grand Headquarters of the German army. The following is an extract from his recent book: *Der König. Weg und Wende.*]

THIS time only two carriages hastened through light showers over the gray road to Vervins, La Capelle, and Avesnes. The usual bodyguards, trumpeters, standard bearers, and medical officers remained behind.

In the first carriage were the King, a captain of the General Staff, and the Count; in the second were General Von Plessen, the Royal Aid, and the Surgeon General of the Staff.

The drive seemed endless and was oppressively quiet. At rare intervals the King would speak a couple of hurried words to the gentlemen in the seat behind, and then resume his silence.

Only in the second carriage was there general conversation.

Von Plessen ruminated. For him the most impossible part of the whole incident was the painful predicament in which the reverse put His Majesty. That ought not to have happened! At a moment like this, when such burdens weighed upon His Majesty's prestige, and indeed, upon the prestige of monarchy itself! One need only to read the papers to see what unhappy consequences would ensue. The gentlemen of the General Staff should avoid such incidents, when they were not perfectly sure of their ground; they should not take risks which might undermine loyalty to His Majesty.

How they had blundered, by advertising a grand offensive under the very eyes of His Majesty — only to get this setback.

Finally Avesnes! The carriages slackened their pace up the steep road. It is exactly four o'clock when they draw up before the red villa occupied by the Bureau of Operations. A guard is waiting their arrival. As the King mounts the steps before the entrance, Marshal Von Hindenburg comes to meet him — dignified, stately, without haste, without hesitation. Only one cavalry officer, his adjutant and son-in-law, follows him at a considerable distance.

The King stretches out a hand to the General and nods his head vigorously. His lips move but his voice fails him. A thousand conflicting thoughts seize his mind. All the bitterness of the past few tortured days he has stored up till now, brooded over it, carried it with him until he might unfold it all here to Hindenburg. He wants to unburden everything.

'Your Majesty has seen much in these hard days,' says Hindenburg; 'the war has shown a hard face. I am happy to welcome Your Majesty here again, and if Your Majesty commands — ?' He glances through the open door.

The King nods. He wants only one

thing — to hear, to be alone with Hindenburg and know the truth, to learn how they think matters will develop. He hastens into the villa.

'General Ludendorff arrived two hours ago. I met him at the station and we have had time to review the situation.'

The King wonders whether Ludendorff is remaining in the background out of faint-heartedness and depression, because his plans have proved a failure? Whether his conscience is troubled over his responsibility? Or whether he intends to use the pretext that the King advised only Hindenburg of his intended visit?

He pauses a moment before the green padded door and looks around. A glance at Von Plessen who understands. He, alone, follows the two.

General Ludendorff is seated at a desk poring over papers. He glances up, lets the monocle fall from his eye, rises quickly, and advances toward the King.

The King says, to start conversation: 'You have had a strenuous tour, Excellency.'

The General notices the nuance. 'Excellency!' Ordinarily he is addressed as 'General' — 'my dear General.' Does this mean anger, disgrace? That matters as little to him as a fly buzzing in the distance.

Hindenburg interrupts: 'I believe that Your Majesty may desire first of all our opinion as to how we got into the critical situation in which we are at present.'

The King nods. His eyes close. The Marshal's words are much too slow for his burning impatience. Hindenburg briefly explains the army's plight. The King exclaims: 'The men went back on us?'

Hindenburg meets his gaze quietly and continues: 'We thought that the drafts sent to the divisions in the

Watter and Winckler groups, which were fighting southwest of Soissons, would have put up a stronger resistance than they did. The troops gave way and we have lost many prisoners.'

He pauses to ponder for a moment, and resumes his account of the fighting: 'Your Majesty knows that they attacked us with several hundred whiffet tanks. These are apparently a newly perfected type of small, speedy tank which rush behind our lines and convert themselves into machine gun nests. The result was that almost immediately our front lines were broken at several points. The men ahead were fighting and defending themselves as best they could, when suddenly they were taken unawares by the rattle of hostile machine guns in their rear. During the ensuing confusion, the men did not know just what had happened, except that they were surrounded; and they lost their heads. It was not until we brought up supports from the rear and got our second line into action, that we could check the enemy, after heavy sacrifices, and organize a new line. That is the course of events as we now understand them —'

The King nods, remains silent, tugs at his coat, then asks abruptly, dryly: 'Will the new line hold?'

The Marshal stands four-square, huge, unmoved. 'That really cannot be foretold, Your Majesty. Our line is between the Aisne and the Marne, and a big enemy offensive is before us. It may go on for days. We have certainly got to count on new attacks on a grand scale, and have, as we are discovering more plainly every day, to reckon with at least a dozen fresh assaulting divisions in the enemy's first line. They must have reserves behind those.'

Perturbed and excited, yet eager to appear firm and deliberate, the King

asks again: 'So we shall retire still farther — give up more ground?' But his voice fails him, and the words escape him ungraciously, almost rudely.

He checks himself carefully and continues: 'I merely beg you to bear in mind, in dealing with this situation, the effect upon the very restive sentiment back home in Germany as well as upon the Allies and the rest of the world. We have to meet increasing criticism and antagonism at home with every day that passes. The significance of this opposition cannot be overestimated — in the interest of the throne.'

Marshal Hindenburg observes with professional calm: 'Certainly, Your Majesty, these things weigh heavily enough upon our hearts. Naturally I am occupied first and foremost with the purely military responsibilities confided to our care and loyalty, with the safety of the army, with accomplishing our military object —'

A pause ensues.

Turning deliberately to General Ludendorff and then back again to the King, Hindenburg continues: 'Perhaps my comrade — ?'

'Certainly,' replies the King curtly, suddenly recalling his thoughts. What Hindenburg had told him had not soothed his nerves. He has something more in his mind. He regards Ludendorff alertly, with a defiant light in his eye. Ludendorff clears his throat and stiffens slightly.

'I beg to impress upon Your Majesty that I received news that the enemy had broken our line only this morning, while discussing our new Flanders' offensive. This painful surprise —'

The King suddenly raises his head and interrupts. 'Then we were all thoroughly taken by surprise?' This short, bitter question flashes out like a challenging thrust. The King is angry and threatening.

But the General continues his first line of thought as if nothing had happened: 'The surprise was not in there being an attack. We expected that from the moment our advance East of Reims was halted, and Marshal Foch had his reserves at his disposal. The surprise was in the failure of our front line, and the extent of the enemy's initial success.'

The General steps over to the chart table, adjusts his monocle, and glancing at the map before him continues: 'The danger in which we are placed by the depth of the enemy's penetration makes it our first task to strengthen the lines at this point — at any cost — against further assault. It is a pivotal position defending the whole Seventh Army, fighting in the Marne elbow. Unless we can feel certain of our Western flank, we cannot undertake further operations around Reims, or withdraw in an orderly way from the South bank of the Marne. So long as we are not in safety at that point, or until we can erect a new front which is safe from the assaults of the enemy, we are not complete masters of the situation and cannot resume the initiative. Here is where we have got to settle things. Here we must decide our further plan of campaign.'

The King listens with distrust and suspicion. One sees the cloven hoof thrust out again. His blood rises. So! Fortify the line, but if that does not succeed, surrender more territory — establish a new front — eventually withdraw from the Marne! The blood rushes to his face! He taps with his foot! Tumultuous passions master him!

A second retreat from the Marne! An unexampled humiliation! And what of the world, which he sees as a circle of evil, spiteful spectators, surrounding the stage on which he has fought and wrestled for his kingdom

for four years? A second and unrecallable check! A new front! But where? The old line on the Aisne? Or the Meuse? And then the Rhiné? He sees the end yawning before him, — the black spectre from which he had averted his face, and shut his eyes in horror so many times that day. A fearful vision floats before him — the disorganized, embittered armies streaming homewards — the shock of disappointment to the nation already shattered and crushed by its sacrifices and privations — the rising of unchained agitators — the breaking forth of the millions who have avidly awaited this moment for years!

Summoning all his resolution, in order not to lose his composure, he blurts out at last: 'No! — I trust we shall not give up a single foot of the soil we have won!'

An oppressive silence follows. Hindenburg glances at Ludendorff, who, with firm set mouth, pores over his map. After a few moments his head rises, and disregarding the interruption, he resumes the thread of his explanation.

'We have brought up all the reserves in sight. The Army Group has transferred the Twentieth Division of Infantry by auto trucks from around Ambrief and Chacrise to strengthen our forces at this point. They will be there to-morrow. The Fifth Infantry Division is being hastened up from St. Quentin. These reinforcements will not help us until a later stage of the battle. Up to that time we can only wait and see. Until then everything

depends on the troops already engaged. I believe they will hold steady.'

He steps back a little. The King's eyes take a far away expression. Then he suddenly looks the General in the face, saying brusquely: 'Yes, Your Excellency. But this sounds rather different from what we were being told four days ago.'

The thin band which united these two men is broken. The General's face flushes scarlet. But he masters himself, except that his voice is a little harsher and sterner than ever: 'Reserves are part of every war, but if Your Majesty has lost confidence —'

The King immediately protests. His temperamental eagerness to conciliate any one whom he has offended reasserts itself. In conclusion he exchanges a few further words with Marshal Hindenburg.

Naturally his personal plans are completely changed by this reverse. He decides to remain at Bosmont close to the front until the situation clarifies.

As they leave the room, a young officer is waiting with a paper in his hand to be approved by Ludendorff. It is the text of the evening telegram of the Wolff Bureau. The King takes it from Hindenburg's hands and reads:

BERLIN, OFFICIAL, *July 18, 1918.*

The French attacked with heavy forces and tanks between the Aisne and the Marne and made some gains. Our reserves have been brought into action.

He handed the sheet back without a word. How harmless it sounded. And yet, unless God works a miracle, this is the turning of the tide!

[*London Times* (Northcliffe Press), December 22, 1920]

M. CAMBON'S FAREWELL

BY A FRIEND

[M. Paul Cambon has ceased to be French Ambassador to the Court of St. James. His career since he went to London from Constantinople twenty-two years ago 'closes one of the most remarkable chapters in the diplomatic history of the present generation.']

M. CAMBON is a living monument of history. He has been the principal moderator, and often the chief director, of Anglo-French relations under three reigns in England, and under a long succession of presidents of the French Republic. Prudent and firm, pertinacious and adaptable, long-sighted, yet tactful and tactical, uniting charm of manner to strength of will, wielding great influence in his own country and scarcely less in ours, Paul Cambon is one of those men who insensibly become institutions while remaining thoroughly human.

Calling recently to bid him farewell, I reminded the Ambassador of our conversations at critical moments before the war and during the war; of one in particular, on the morning of Sunday, August 2, 1914. The news had come in the night of the invasion of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, whose neutrality was guaranteed, singly but not jointly, by five Great Powers.

I had then asked him if he had any news of what England would do. The Luxemburg Treaty lay before him on his table. 'Why ask me?' he had said, almost abruptly. 'There is the treaty. I have just shown it to Sir Edward Grey and put to him the same question you have put to me. What did he answer? Nothing. I do not know whether this evening we shall not have to strike

the word "honor" out of the English vocabulary.'

'Did I say that?' asked M. Cambon quickly. 'It was a very stiff thing to say.'

'Yes, M. l'Ambassadeur, you said it, and I, though an Englishman, took no offence at it, for it was a very stiff situation and your responsibility was terrific.'

'Ah!' he continued. 'Those were the only three days of real difficulty in all the years I have spent in London — the first, second, and third of August, 1914. Think what they meant. Your Cabinet had been discussing the European crisis repeatedly. We had relied on the support of three or four ministers. Some of them, but not all, had been influenced by weighty representations from important men in the city in favor of British neutrality. On the morning of Saturday, August 1, there had been another Cabinet meeting. Afterward, I saw Grey, who told me that the government had not been able to decide upon intervention in the war. He spoke very gravely. I replied that I could not and would not tell my government that. "After all that has passed between our two countries," I exclaimed, "after the withdrawal of our forces ten kilometres within our frontier so that German patrols can actually move on our soil without hin-