

RECORD OF POLITICAL EVENTS

[From August 1, 1916, to July 31, 1917].

I. THE EUROPEAN WAR.

THE WESTERN FRONT.—A series of midsummer battles as furious as they were futile, fought around the ruined villages of Thiaumont and Fleury, to the northeast of **Verdun**, failed to obscure the fact that after six months of unremitting exertion the German Crown Prince was at last compelled, in August, to abandon his costly offensive against Verdun. With the Germans baffled at Verdun, the third year of the war opened most auspiciously for the Allies, who now found themselves for the first time in a position of incontestable military superiority on the western front. The turn of the tide was signalized by the replacement, on August 29, of General von Falkenhayn, who as chief of the German general staff had sponsored the Verdun campaign, by Field Marshal von Hindenburg, leader of the "Eastern School" of German generals, who advocated an aggressive strategy in the east, a passive strategy in the west. Henceforth the Germans were to stand on the defensive in France and Belgium while their line was painfully battered back, mile by mile.—The principal effort of the Allies was made on a forty-mile front astride the River Somme, just at the point where the British and French armies joined hands. In the first month of the **battle of the Somme** (see last RECORD, p. 2), the Allies stormed the German first line trenches, opened a breach sixteen miles wide in the elaborate German second line, and penetrated at certain points to a distance of six miles. Still the Germans clung grimly to their well-prepared third line of defense on the crest of the shell-scarred ridge north of the Somme. During August and September French troops fought their way around the southern end of the ridge, while British armies, a little further north, by dint of the most strenuous fighting carried the crest of the middle portion of the ridge and broke through the German third line. Like the jaws of gigantic pincers, British and French armies closed upon the town of Combles, which served as a German military base at the eastern end of the ridge, until on the night of September 25 the German garrison stealthily withdrew to the eastward. On September 26, while a French column was exultantly marching into Combles, British regiments stormed the strongly fortified village of Thiepval, commanding the northwestern reaches of the ridge. A spectacular feature of the battle for the ridge was the employment by the British of monstrous armored motor-trucks, called "tanks," veritable forts on wheels, or rather, on caterpillar treads. After the victories of September, the Allies moved out on the northern slopes of the ridge, until the British reached Le Sars, less than four miles from

Bapaume, and the French came to Sailly-Saillisel, east of Combles. South of the river, the French line was pushed close to the outskirts of Péronne and Chaulnes and came to a standstill. On the extreme right, the British burst through the German line in the Ancre valley and advanced a few thousand yards in November. By November 18 the battle of the Somme had drawn to a close. In four months, July 1 to November 1, the Allies had won more ground than had the Germans at Verdun; they had captured 73,000 prisoners, 130 heavy guns, and many smaller pieces; and had inflicted on the Germans a total loss of over 700,000 men, according to a French statement. The Allies, however, had suffered heavy casualties. The total losses of English and French in four months were estimated at not less than 600,000. Though neither Bapaume nor Péronne had been attained, the battle of the Somme was not fruitless; General Sir Douglas Haig claimed it had relieved Verdun and worn down German man-power; furthermore it had created an embarrassing salient in the German line.—In the course of the battle of the Somme so many German troops were shifted from the region of Verdun to the new battle-area, that a tempting opportunity was afforded for a **French counter-stroke at Verdun**. General Nivelle saw and seized the opportunity. By two brilliant attacks, October 24–November 4 and December 15–18, General Nivelle regained Forts Douaumont and Vaux, together with seven villages, on the heights northeast of Verdun. General Nivelle's reward was the highest in the power of France to bestow. On December 19 (obedient to a decree of December 13) he assumed command of all French forces in France; General Joffre was honorably retired, with the title "Marshal of France."—About February 22 the British advance guards, cautiously creeping forward in the **Ancre Valley**, discovered that the German trenches were empty, except for a few machine-gun crews and ingenious dummy soldiers. By February 28 the British had pushed forward two and a half miles on an eleven-mile front and had wiped out the Ancre salient.—On March 15 the Germans began a retreat which soon appeared as a **general retirement** on the whole front from the "elbow" at Noyon, in the south, to the vicinity of Arras, in the north. Astonished and elated, British infantry marched into Bapaume, March 16, and Péronne, March 18 (the British had taken over the French sector of the Somme battle-front at the close of December); so rapid was the advance, that in the first week 40 villages were occupied by the British, and cavalry once more came into use. South of the Somme, the French pursued the Germans with such alacrity that by March 20 General Foch's *poilus* stood within five miles of the important city of St. Quentin and were close upon the fortress of La Fère, further south. At one point the rate of advance was 23 miles in three days. By the end of March the Anglo-French armies had occupied a sector sixty-five miles long, twenty-five miles broad at the widest part, and 1000 square miles in area, that is, about one-eighth of the French territory which had been conquered by the German invader. Several important towns and cities, notably